

## Unity

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## Unity

by [St4rDustSp33dW4y](#)

### Summary

Please, you need to be 18+ to read and interact with me. Thank you.

Part 2 of Harmony. Do not read this if you haven't finished that story yet.

Shadow's shift is finally, finally over. If this three day weekend had come any later, he'd start breaking skulls. The missions aren't hard by any means. No, quite the opposite. There has barely been any activity going on since the doctor has been incarcerated. That's been three years ago.

### Notes

This is Part 2 of Harmony. This takes place 3 years after the events of that story.

Again, this story is NOT canon. It's an AU.

I don't know what else to say other than I hope you enjoy it!

# Anniversary



## Chapter One: Anniversary

Shadow's shift is finally, finally over. If this three day weekend had come any later, he'd start breaking skulls. The missions aren't hard by any means. No, quite the opposite. There has barely been any activity going on since the doctor has been incarcerated. That's been three years ago.

The problem is that his team is training rookies and the men assigned under his order act like their shit doesn't stink. He's fully aware of his short stature and that he's an anthropomorphic hedgehog, but he's the Ultimate Life Form, damn it. He could destroy those jerks in an instant. The thought is enough to make him rethink his morality. Still, he has to just suck it up and do his job.

HQ has been rebuilt and back up and running for awhile now, but GUN is taking extra precautions and hiring way more agents than needed. A lot of those jerks are luckily being repositioned to Prison Island anyway so he won't have to deal with them after this. They're pretty much just getting trained to be overpaid, over-glorified security guards.

Shadow leaves the moment he clocks out and doesn't even wait up for his two teammates. He's completely done with this week and doesn't want to think about it until Tuesday morning when he absolutely has to.

No, this weekend is his and Sonic's. Today is their three year anniversary and he doesn't want anything ruining that. So, he picks up a bouquet of flowers and a bottle of wine and heads back to his apartment.

Shadow stops and takes a breath before opening the lobby door, just to make sure he isn't still tense

from his day. As he makes his way up the steps, he hears one of the tenant's doors open.

Espio is exchanging a look of pleading with him before he speaks, "I apologize, Shadow. I know it's a special day for you and Sonic, but... He's been playing his guitar all day and I have a midnight shift to work tonight. Do you think you can tell him to tone it down?"

Shadow sighs and gives him an apologetic look. Espio has been living under them for about a year and a half now. He has job at night and his hours are all over the place. Espio is really the only neighbor he kind of respects because he's soft spoken and polite.

"I'm so sorry," Shadow apologizes to him, "I'll talk to him. He's *still* getting used to the concept of living in an apartment." He says *still* because Sonic has been living with him for about two years now.

Espio just nods to him, "I know. I can tell. I didn't want to report it because..."

Shadow doesn't even need him to finish. He's had to talk to his landlord a handful of times and pay about a dozen noise complaint tickets. If he wasn't a GUN agent and Sonic didn't have his popularity, they probably would have gotten kicked out awhile ago.

Shadow waves him off and climbs the stairs. He waits at the door and takes another deep breath. He needed to remain calm. He couldn't lose his temper. He has to remind himself that it's a special day today and anything else can wait.

He unlocks the door and opens it. The moment he walks in, he sees Sonic standing on his counter with a guitar in his hands. Shadow can feel his eye twitching.

"Happy anniversary, babe! This one's for you!" Sonic shouts and jumps off the counter as his fingers shred across the fret board. It's loud as it reverberates off the amplifiers. It would be pretty impressive if the circumstances were different. Although when the cheesy lyrics start pouring from his mouth, it's enough to make Shadow want to cringe, "All hail Shadow! Heroes rise again! Obliterating everything that's not your friend!"

Shadow barely has the mental capacity for this as he shuts the door of his apartment to spare his neighbors from the noise echoing through the hall. He exasperatedly walks over to the amplifier the moment Sonic starts screaming a distorted '*Bow your heads low! All hail Shadow!*' into his microphone. Shadow turns it off and unplugs it for good measure.

It takes Sonic a minute to realize that his screams aren't being distorted anymore and his guitar is only omitting pathetic clanging noises. He looks down at it like there's something wrong with it before he looks up at Shadow, who is glaring at him with intense ferocity. "Uh... Happy anniversary, Shads?" Sonic says sheepishly.

"You are to sell that thing immediately," Shadow snarls.

"What?" Sonic says with offense, "I wrote that song just for you."

"You are going to get us kicked out of this apartment," Shadow states.

Sonic sputters his lips and laughs, "I'm Sonic the Hedgehog. They're not gunna kick us out. I signed an autograph for our landlord's daughter. We're all good."

"That isn't the point," Shadow folds his arms across his chest, "Did you forget your friend Espio lives under us? He's trying to sleep. He works midnights."

Sonic blinks as if he's completely forgotten, "Oh yeah." He taps his foot on the ground a few times to imitate a knocking sound and shouts at the floor, "Sorry, buddy!"

Shadow clasps his hand around Sonic's wrist and pulls him into the living room. He pushes him back against the couch and stares down at him with rage, "I've had it up to *here* with this. I can't stand your sporadic behavior. You act like a child. A hyperactive child. *All the time*. I don't understand what your problem is, but..."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Sonic holds his hands up, "I don't have a problem. It's you that has a problem." Sonic leans forward and rests his hands to his cheeks, "Did you have a bad day? Wanna talk about it?"

"I..." Shadow turns away and grits his teeth. He hates that Sonic nailed it right on the head. He was hoping to fight with him more just to get the aggression out.

"Are those for me!?" Sonic asks as he gets onto his feet. He holds his hands out and smiles at Shadow.

Shadow sees Sonic's smile and he knows he's done for. He sighs and gives into his charm, nodding slowly. He places the flowers and wine into Sonic's hands, reluctantly.

Sonic's smile widens and pulls the flowers up to his nose and sniffs them. They're Forget Me Nots. Shadow's given them to Sonic every year since their first date. Sonic leans in and kisses Shadow's cheek before rushing into the kitchen to pull out a vase. He fills it with water and cuts the bottoms of the stems off, shaking the little packet into it like it's second nature.

Shadow watches him and feels like maybe he was being too hard on him. He did the one thing he's been trying to avoid all day and it really wasn't fair to Sonic. He walks back into the kitchen and glances over at the guitar and amp resting against the counter. "How long have you been playing guitar for?" Shadow asks a bit stubbornly. Although, he's legitimately curious because he's never personally seen him play.

Sonic's face brightens up when he hears the question, "I started learning a year ago. Espio was helping me out. He plays at a night club for the extra cash. I mighta slipped him a few bills for the lessons."

"Really," Shadow says like he doesn't believe him. Sonic never has money. All he ever needs to do is shoot some finger guns and a smile and people do what he wants. It's both charming and irritating as all hell.

"Uh huh," Sonic goes on as he leans against the counter and touches the delicate petals of the flowers, "It was easy to pick up once I memorized the chords and finger placements."

"And he helped you write that song," Shadow concludes with a stale look.

"No way," Sonic explains with shock that Shadow doesn't believe him, "I told you I wrote that. I went through your record collection and tried to get a feel for the type of music you listen to. I mean, yeah, it's not as heavy as some of the stuff you listen to, but I had to find something that fit with my voice."

Shadow's face drops when he hears that. Sonic actually put a lot of thought and effort into this and he wrote it off like it was some kind of joke. "Listen," Shadow walks over to Sonic and takes both of his hands in his, "Tomorrow. Tomorrow is Saturday and you can be as loud as you want. I'll listen to the entirety of it. I promise."

Sonic looks away with a pout, but feels his face heat up anyway, "I guess..." He waits until he sees Shadow's concerned look before letting a smile spread across his face. When Shadow sees that it was just a rouse though, his lips are on Sonic's chest in an attempt to tickle him and the blue hero bursts into uncontrollable laughter. He pulls Shadow closer to him and guides his mouth to his and kisses him deeply.

Shadow rests his hands on the counter on either side of Sonic's hips and pins him there as he tilts his head. He glides his tongue against Sonic's lips and asks for entrance before having it granted to him. He presses their tongues together and they go to war, feverishly. He hears Sonic whine against his mouth and he moans back in satisfaction as he delves his tongue in deeper.

Sonic fights it until Shadow presses up against him and he finally surrenders. Shadow's tongue slows and eases up when he senses Sonic's submission. He feels Shadow pull away and Sonic feels lightheaded, but in the best way possible.

Shadow is staring down at Sonic's lips and running his thumb across it seductively, "So... All hail Shadow, huh? Does that mean you'll be getting on your knees tonight?"

Sonic shudders against Shadow, but manages to laugh. "Well... I could, but," Sonic starts to say. He kisses Shadow's lips and trails them down his chest, and down even lower.

Shadow watches Sonic with hungry eyes and places a guiding hand on his head.

Sonic stops when he gets to Shadow's lower stomach and gets on his knees. He feels Shadow guide him down lower, but Sonic shakes his head. He smirks when he sees Shadow give him a bewildered look. He takes Shadow's hand in his and lifts himself to one knee.

Shadow raises an eyebrow when he sees Sonic's shy and anxious face.

"Shadow, we've been dating for three years now and... They've been full of crazy awesome memories. In a lot of ways, you've kinda become stable ground for me while I'm floating away aimlessly. And like... I appreciate that," Sonic starts saying, but gets a little flustered.

"Sonic?" Shadow asks, not sure what's happening.

"Just let me finish, Shadow," Sonic says as he bites his lip nervously, "I know I'm really bad with words, but I wanna do this right."

Shadow just nods and urges him to continue.

"I know I'm a mess sometimes. No, like *all the time*, but you've helped me get better at a lot of stuff," Sonic carries on softly, "And like... you make me wanna be a better version of myself." Sonic reaches behind him and hold up a gold wedding band, "I guess, what I'm trying to say is... Shadow the Hedgehog, will you marry me?"

Shadow looks down at the ring and then into Sonic's eyes. He looks unsure of what to say and Sonic can feel his brow sweating. "Sonic... This means we'll be life partners. Are you willing to sacrifice that much freedom for me?"

Sonic shrugs like it's nothing even though he can feel the tears pricking at the corners of his eyes, "It's not much of a sacrifice if you're the only one I want."

Shadow places a hand to his mouth like he can't believe what he's hearing. He gives Sonic a concerned look, "What's the proper etiquette? How do I accept?"

Sonic just snickers, “You just say ‘I do,’ Shads.”

“I do,” Shadow states with a serious look.

Sonic tries not to laugh because Shadow’s eyes are way too intense. He doesn’t mind too much though because that’s just how he likes him. Sonic slides the ring onto Shadow’s finger and gets back onto his feet.

Shadow admires the ring and knits his brows together, “That was the purpose of your song. I ruined your proposal.”

Sonic shakes his head, “Nah, I realized how cheesy it was. I should know by now that less is more with you.”

“No,” Shadow shakes his head and rests his hands on Sonic’s shoulders, “You do a lot for me as well and I disregard it and treat it as if it were nothing. I promise I’ll get better at that.” Shadow pulls Sonic in and kisses him deeply with slow, fiery passion.

When Shadow pulls away, Sonic can feel his eyes roll back a little. He has a stupid grin on his face, but once he regains his composure he nuzzles his forehead against Shadow’s.

“How did you afford this?” Shadow asks as he stares into Sonic’s emerald eyes.

Sonic rubs the back of his neck and looks away a bit sheepishly, “I might have gotten a part-time job.”

“You did *not*,” Shadow says in disbelief, “You? A stable job?”

Sonic snorts, “I wouldn’t say stable. It was more like hanging out at a comic book store for like 5 hours a day. Like... babysitting books until someone walks in. Which isn’t that often.”

Shadow shakes his head, “No, that’s a job, Sonic. You maintained a schedule. That’s... incredible.”

“Stop it,” Sonic says with embarrassment as he pushes Shadow away, “I just have a lot of free time on my hands.”

Shadow chuckles and pulls Sonic back in, kissing up his neck. He feels Sonic shudder against him and he loves it. He frowns when he sees Sonic backing away and he places a hand on his hip.

“After dinner,” Sonic bargains, “Besides, weren’t you the one who wanted me to be quiet?”

“I have my ways of silencing you,” Shadow retorts in a dark tone.

Sonic feels his insides coil, but fights it. He pulls out the second wedding band and hands it to Shadow, holding his hand out for him, “Do the honors?”

“Gladly,” Shadow agrees as he takes the small gold ring in his hand and carefully slips it on Sonic’s finger. He kisses the back of Sonic’s hand and stares deep within his emerald eyes, “I love you.”

Sonic’s face fumes red and he smiles nervously, “I love you too, Shadow.”

Shadow helps Sonic set the table. It isn’t anything fancy, but that’s the point of tonight really. It’s kind of the way they like it. Comfortable and quaint. Shadow pulls out the onion rings that are in the oven as Sonic goes on about how the Crockpot they got last Christmas has saved him from starvation on numerous occasions.

Yeah, they're having chili dogs and onion rings like they had that one night, but over the years Sonic has become quite the cook. This has actually become a special occasion thing nowadays. It's kind of crazy.

Shadow opens the bottle of wine and pours it into two glasses. When he sees Sonic grab his right away, he places his hand on the top to stop him. "Small sips," Shadow reminds him.

Sonic gives him a sheepish look and nods his head.

Sonic's birthday was a month and a half ago. He had just turned 21 and he hadn't really gotten the hang of the concept of drinking so it was a pretty bad experience. Shadow had to take care of the poor guy that night. He didn't want a repeat of that for both of their sakes.

Although, Sonic is finding that he's really enjoying Shadow while he's buzzed. He knows Shadow is very particular about how much he does drink, but he likes how much less uptight he is. The longing glances, whispers in his ear, and the smiles are nice touches too.

Sonic just doesn't expect to be pulled into Shadow's lap at the kitchen table and feeling his mouth all over his chest. He sucks in a sharp breath when he hears Shadow whisper that he wants to mark up every inch of his skin and make love to him on every piece of furniture he owns. Sonic feels dizzy, but in a good way. Especially when he feels Shadow's hand sliding up his thigh.

Shadow must have forgotten his anger about the noise level too because he's purposefully doing things to make Sonic cry out and begging him to continue. Sonic moans when he feels Shadow's teeth sharp on his chest, teasing and licking. And Shadow's hands. Pleasuring him from the front and behind at once. Sonic feels lightheaded and overheated from it, but he loves it.

Shadow growls and demands his release and all Sonic can do is cry out and comply. As he's coming undone in a flurry of movements, Shadow pulls him up and twists him around, shoving his body against the tabletop as he does him from behind. Sonic clutches the tablecloth in a tight grip and chokes on a moan when he feels Shadow filling him to the brim with his love.

He shudders as Shadow's lips trail up his spine and whispers that he loves him in his ear.

Shadow keeps his promise about making love to him on every piece of furniture. Sonic's recovery time is incredible, but he really has Shadow to blame for that. He knows exactly where to touch and kiss to make him go wild.

He holds Sonic's hips in a secure grip as Sonic braces himself on the countertop as Shadow does him from the front. He pulls Sonic on top of him and lets Sonic ride him on the couch. He does Sonic from behind against the bathroom sink.

Although as it gets later in the night, Shadow has Sonic against his sheets and makes love to him slowly and passionately, looking down into his eyes like he's his entire world. He kisses Sonic tenderly and moves his quaking hips in slow motions, just feeling the other's heat.

"You feel so *good*," Shadow croons out as he feels every inch of his body prick. He hums out a low moan and kisses up Sonic's chest to his neck and murmurs, "Oh, Sonic. I want to live inside you forever."

Sonic grips the sheets and nods even though he's pretty sure that statement makes no sense. It just felt right at the time. He wants to feel this good and this connected with Shadow forever. Sonic opens his legs wider, even though his muscles strain with the movement, just so he can feel Shadow fuller and more deeply.

Shadow moans as he pushes in further. He has to blink the stars away from his vision in order to keep his eyes on the other. He grips Sonic's hand and feels the cool touch of the ring on his finger. Their promise to be together. He knew he wanted to be by Sonic's side forever, but knowing Sonic wants the same ignites the inferno inside him. He feels his chest hitch and he gasps in heavy breaths as he whispers, "I love you. I love you so much, Sonic."

Sonic grips his hand back and feels his eyes slip shut, his emotions a whirlwind inside him. Shadow's voice of desperation is incredibly sexy to him and the way Shadow says in name with full emphasis and with so much purpose makes him *feel* the love behind it. He buries half his face in the mattress and looks up at Shadow with one eye open as he whispers in awe, "I love you too, Shadow."

Shadow grits his teeth as a growl tears from his vocal chords. Sonic's face. His body language. One half-lidded eye staring up at him full of lust, his pale skin tinged with a warm blush, and his body open for him to take. His insides twist and it's almost painful how quick his release is. It's a powerful surge of vigor that leaves him trembling and his breaths uneasy. It's too much, too fast, but he'll be damned if it isn't incredible.

Shadow collapses onto the sheets and pulls Sonic's back to his front. His hand reaches around Sonic's body and he gets Sonic off with the flick of his wrist. He presses himself against the blue hero so he can physically feel the other's quivering aftershocks and he plants kisses against his skin as he whispers, "That's it. Give it to me." He feels Sonic's head arch against his shoulder and he grinds his hips in rhythmic motions to ease his lover into a pleasant afterglow.

Sonic takes a moment to breathe before rolling over to face Shadow. He licks his lips before kissing Shadow and hisses, "Holy shit, Shadow. My body won't stop shaking."

Shadow seethes and clenches his teeth. Sonic never swears, but on the rare occasion he does it's in the bedroom and he loves it. He pulls Sonic against his chest and gently slides his hand down Sonic's back to quell his quivering body.

They lay like that until the calm settles over them. Although, with that comes the acidic soreness in their muscles and the heavy fatigue. Shadow struggles to keep his eyes open even though all he wants to do is look at and think about is the hedgehog in front of him.

Sonic is looking up at him in adoration when he whispers, "I can't believe I'm going to spend my life with you. It's pretty crazy."

Shadow just nods at him.

"It's scary," Sonic admits and he half-blames it on the alcohol in his system for saying it out loud, "but thrilling at the same time."

Shadow places a finger to Sonic's chin and guides his head up to his, "Do you have doubts? Any at all?"

Sonic looks into Shadow's eyes. His eyes shifting back and forth as he takes in Shadow's intense gaze. His face melts into one with a bit more confidence, but it's real and certain, "No, I'm sure. I'm a really indecisive kinda guy, but I've never been more sure about anything in my life. I wanna get married."

"As do I," Shadow says softly as his eyes close without him telling them too. The one thing he remembers before falling asleep is Sonic's body against his and a tender kiss upon his lips.



# A Rude Awakening

## Chapter Notes

Hey, um... My last chapter had several grammar errors. I try to edit these the best I can, but sometimes a few mistakes fall through the cracks. Bare with me. Feel free to call them out if you see them, but I'm by no means making it your job to call them out. I'll catch as many as I can when I see them. So, if I mess something up, I apologize in advance.

Thank you so much for reading and thank you for your patience.



## Chapter Two: A Rude Awakening

Shadow wakes to a throbbing headache and a spotty memory. This hasn't happened in years, yet here he was. He pulls himself up and cringes at his sore muscles. He glances down at the blue hero passed out next to him who's sleeping hard. Nothing is going to wake Sonic from that.

Shadow rubs his hand to his forehead before leaning down to kiss Sonic gently. He gazes down at Sonic and how he doesn't even move in response to it. Dead asleep. Just as he thought.

Shadow pulls himself out of bed and stumbles down the hallway in search for some aspirin. He finds it in the bathroom cabinet and glances down at the mess splayed out across his feet. Oh right. He

made it his mission to make love to Sonic on everything he owns.

He sighs just thinking about how trashed his apartment must be. He wants to fight his past-self for being so reckless. He makes a mental note to go easy on the alcohol next time the occasion arises.

He pops open the bottle and leans under the faucet to drink the painkiller down. Usually, he'd never drink from the tap like this, but he's in too much pain to really care. He shuffles back into the bedroom and is just about to lay down when he hears his doorbell buzz.

He winces as the noise drills into his skull. He tries to ignore it, passing it off as a door-to-door salesman trying to sell something on the weekend, but a moment later there's a knock on his door. Shadow growls and gets up again, stomping over to the door.

If it is a salesman, he's going to murder them!

He opens the door and is met with the pink hedgehog. Shadow presses his fingers at the bridge of his nose and grumbles out, "Amy... Sonic's vacation is..."

"I know," she says urgently, "And I wouldn't have come if it weren't extremely important. I need to talk to Sonic right away."

"It can't wait?" Shadow asks and almost seems pleading.

She shakes her head, "It's a catastrophic emergency. The future is at stake."

Shadow absolutely hates the fact that Sonic is the hero of the earth right now. He wants to destroy the world personally just out of spite right now. He takes a breath and eases those thoughts back.

"Just wait here," Shadow growls distastefully as he wobbles back into the bedroom. He catches himself on the wall in the hallway before stumbling into the bedroom. "Sonic," Shadow hisses out, trying to get the hero's attention. There's no response though and he makes his way over to the bed. He shakes Sonic's shoulder and tries again, "Sonic."

Nothing.

Shadow sighs. He hates this. He doesn't want to wake the guy up. He's sleeping so hard right now.

He eases down onto the bed and gently touches Sonic's face. He watches as Sonic's eyelids tense and slowly flutter open. He blinks a few times before his eyes come into the focus. Sonic smiles softly at him, "Hey."

Shadow feels his heart sink. All he wants right now is to lay in bed with him. He gives Sonic a regretful look as he whispers, "Amy's here. Apparently there's something big happening right now."

Sonic's nose scrunches and his lip curls, "Are you kidding?" Sonic rolls over and groans, "Tell her to go jump off a cliff."

"Sonic," Shadow frowns when he hears that, "She's your friend."

Sonic looks over his shoulder and sticks his tongue out at him.

"Sonic," Shadow repeats, his voice getting a bit rougher.

Sonic whips around, laying flat against his back. He lets out a childish groan and throws his hands up in the air, "There's been barely any activity for two years and now, the morning after of my anniversary, the world is in peril?!"

“It’s your duty as a hero,” Shadow reminds him, “You’re to be on call no matter what.”

“I know-I know. I’m just...” Sonic whips the blankets off him and gets up, “It’s just... *bullshit*. This better not happen on the night of our honeymoon or I’m just gunna sit under the moonlight with you and watch the world burn.”

Shadow looks away and bites his lip. He can’t believe he can still feel the flames of arousal burning in his gut after the night they just had. He lets out a breath and stands up. He shifts through the closet as he sees Sonic leaning over and pulling his shoes on. As Sonic is tapping the fronts on the ground, getting them aligned with his feet, Shadow is walking over with a jacket.

It’s warm out, but the welts and bruises on Sonic’s torso and arms are *bad*. Shadow was not easy on him last night. At all. To be fair though, neither expected to be leaving the apartment for a few days.

“Thank you,” Sonic says gratefully as Shadow helps him put it on. He zips it up and smiles down at it. Shadow had it custom made for him last Christmas. It’s red with white stripes down the arms with a gold ring emblem with wings across the back.

The blue hero turns to Shadow and gives him a look of remorse, “I’m so sorry about this, Shadow.”

“It’s alright,” Shadow murmurs as he places a kiss to his lips, “Just kick whatever it’s ass is and come back home.”

Sonic winks at him and grins, “I’m the fastest thing alive. I’ll be back before you know it.”

Shadow nods, believing him. He’s been letting Sonic go on his own missions to help him improve his skills. He does notice his slight improvements each time too. It’s impressive really.

He walks with Sonic out into the living room and sees him greeting Amy in his usual upbeat nature he does with all his friends. Shadow opens a drawer and pulls out his green Chaos Emerald and hands it to Sonic.

Sonic stops talking and just looks up at Shadow with a hesitant look, “You sure?” Shadow very rarely trusts him with it alone.

“Of course,” Shadow says with a smirk, “It’s not doing you much use sitting here.”

“Thanks,” Sonic says, trying to stop his voice from sounding too in awe. He takes it and gives Shadow a thumbs up.

Shadow just waves him off and watches Sonic head out the door. When the door closes, his face drops a bit. It’s strange. When something like this happens, the military usually gets involved. He usually gets a radio response from his commander even before Sonic’s friends get drawn into it. He knows he should trust Sonic to handle himself and he knows he allows Sonic to handle missions on his own more, but he likes to be in close range in case he needs to step in.

Shadow walks back into the bedroom and grabs his radio, “Shadow to Rouge. Do you copy?”

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As they head down the stairs and out of the building, Amy awes at the green gemstone, “Wow! Shadow actually gave you his Chaos Emerald?”

Sonic just rolls his eyes, “Uh... Duh. He *totally* trusts me.”

Amy folds her arms behind her back and smiles, "I'll say." She gives Sonic a sly look as she asks, "Is there a reason Shadow always has the green emerald?"

"Oh, that's easy," Sonic responds with a confident look, "He's the Ultimate Life Form. So, like if he has at least one of the Chaos Emeralds the bad guys are forced to try and go through him first."

"Yeah," Amy says, "but why green?"

"It's Shadow's favorite color," Sonic states simply.

"Ah. I see," she gives him a knowing look, "And yours is red." She gestures to Sonic's signature red shoes. She would know too. She used to where all red the ten years she's crushed on Sonic. Now, she's gone back to wearing purple and green.

Sonic raises an eyebrow at her, "Yeah, so?"

"Is that why you two constantly get lost in each other's eyes?" Amy asks with a giggle.

"A-Amy!?" Sonic jumps back a bit flustered.

She just sends him a playful punch that actually kind of hurts, "Oh, come on. I'm eighteen now. I'm not a kid anymore. I know what you two do."

Sonic gives her a grossed out look and rubs his sore arm, "Can you spare me the awkwardness of this? Otherwise, I'm gunna warp to the hero base without you."

"Don't be so mean," Amy pouts, "I was just pointing it out. Besides, I didn't know Shadow's favorite color was green until now. With his décor, I would have guessed black."

"That's just to keep up his appearance," Sonic says like it's nothing. He does feel for Shadow though sometimes. He has to keep up his gloomy demeanor in order to mask any and all weaknesses he might have. People can be jerks if anything gets through the cracks. He has a feeling that was the cause of Shadow's bad mood when he got home yesterday.

"I see," Amy says thoughtfully, "and I bet you get to know the real Shadow under that stoic exterior."

Sonic feels his brow tense when he hears that. He doesn't know why, but it rubs him the wrong way. He places his hands on his hips and says snottily, "You're a bit too invested in my relationship with Shadow. It's kinda creeping me out."

She looks offended, "Ah! I don't ask any more intrusive questions than anyone else. Why do you get like this? Just because I used to have a crush on you? Why can't you get over that?"

Sonic gives her a disgusted look, "Whatever, Ames. Maybe *you* need to get over it."

"I have been. For three years now," Amy responds with a huff, "You're just too stubborn to acknowledge it."

"Yeah, right. I know you hang out with Shadow while I'm not there," Sonic points out with a frown.

"Hang out?" Amy retorts with anger, "He's helping me *train*. So I can be a better asset to the team? *Your* team! And it's not like I'm with him alone or anything. Tails and Cream are with me."

"Shadow is mine, okay?" Sonic states like a kid who doesn't want to share his favorite toy as he holds up his ring finger, "I already sealed the deal. So, look elsewhere."

Amy looks like she's going to throw another angry comeback, but stops when she sees the ring. Her eyes light up. "You finally proposed!?" She squeals in delight, "Oh my gosh, Sonic! Congrats!"

"Uh..." Sonic looks away like he's not expecting that reaction and rubs his finger under his nose with embarrassment, "...Thanks."

Amy goes on and on about possible decorations and designs like she's the wedding planner or something and Sonic tries not to die of embarrassment. When they finally get to base, Amy leads him into one of the recovery rooms. Her demeanor is back to being worried when she walks in.

Sonic glances inside and raises an eyebrow when he sees the person laying down. She's a cat with purple fur, but her clothes suggest she's either not from this world or from a different time entirely. She's out cold and she looks badly injured.

"What happened to her?" Sonic asks in concern.

"I'm not too sure," Amy explains, "I was doing my daily reading this morning and it said there would be a large amount of chaos energy at the beach and I found her washed up on the shore."

"Ugh. Those tarot cards again," Sonic says with a dull look.

"They work, okay? If I hadn't used them to tell you where the generators were when you fought Metal, you would have never beaten Eggman," Amy explains with anger.

Sonic rolls his eyes, "Yeah, yeah. And they also said I'd fall in love with you or whatever."

"I had *one* bad reading," Amy states.

"Tell that to twelve-year-old you," Sonic points out blandly.

Amy just lets out an agitated noise, "Are you really going to judge me for something I did that long ago?" That shuts Sonic up for a moment before she continues, "Regardless, I found her washed up on the beach. She had something with her. Or rather... *someone*."

Sonic just gives her a confused look, but she guides him out of the room and into another one before he can ask.

Tails is sitting on the cot and smiles at Sonic with a relieved look, "You're finally here." He gets up and pulls Sonic into a half hug.

Sonic smiles and hugs him back. He looks up at his brother and remembers how he used to be so much shorter than him. Now, Tails is taller than most of the Freedom Fighters. Sonic looks down at what's in his arms and gasps.

It's a white baby hedgehog.

Sonic slowly turns back to Amy with a look of bewilderment.

"Yeah, she brought him with her," Amy explains, "Before she passed out, she told me her world was completely destroyed and to have you look after him."

Sonic raises a brow and kind of laughs, "What? Me specifically?"

"Yeah," Amy nods, "She apparently knows you and referred to you as the Legendary Hero: Sonic the Hedgehog."

Sonic gives them a frantic look, “W-w-wait! Back up! I’m cool and all, but Legendary Hero? You can’t just trust some stranger.”

Amy shrugs a little, “I could just tell. She was giving off this strange aura. Almost god-like. I think she might be from the future.”

Sonic clutches his chest when he hears the word ‘god-like’ and swallows his anxiety down. Now, he really doesn’t want to deal with this. No god stuff. He wasn’t doing it. He shakes his head and gives them a hard stare, “Dude, I was on vacation. I could be in bed sleeping. And you bring me all the way over here for this? I told you only to bother me for emergencies.”

“Please, Sonic,” Tails pleas.

Sonic frowns. Even his own brother was in on this. “Look, Shadow would *murder* me if I came home with a baby. That’s his place more than it is mine. He pays the bills and everything. I kinda just... hang there,” Sonic explains like he’s throwing excuses around.

“You hang there?” Amy says doubtfully, “For two years?”

Sonic opens his mouth and takes in a breath, but closes it right away. He sighs and shakes his head. “I can’t take care of a kid and I can just see Shadow’s reaction,” Sonic says and then starts to do an admittedly pretty damn good impression of Shadow, “‘You? Take care of a child? Ha! You can’t even take care of yourself.’”

Amy taps her foot on the ground impatiently, “I thought you said Shadow trusts you.”

Sonic shrivels in on himself a little before muttering, “Okay. He’s eased up on me a little, but I can totally tell. And he has every right to feel like I can’t handle myself. I forget to eat if I get a new video game. I’m way too loud and messy. I go stir crazy if I’m in the apartment alone for longer than an hour. Half the time I can barely stop myself from falling asleep in front of the tv. The guy carries me to bed most nights.” Sonic stops because he can tell he’s rambling. He crosses his arms across his chest and pouts, “That kid is in safer hands with literally anyone else. I’d probably kill it in the first week.”

Tails steps forward and bargains, “It’s only until she wakes up again and we get her full explanation. We’ll contact you the moment she does.” He smiles down at Sonic and adds, “And besides, I’ve lived with you longer than Shadow has and I know you’re not that bad. I think you can do it.”

Sonic frowns and looks away, “I appreciate it, buddy, but... I think you guys should find someone else. This... just isn’t for me.”

Amy looks like she’s going to interject, but Tails stops her. He places a hand on Sonic’s head much like how Sonic used to do to him and he nods, “Alright. I’ll take care of him, but if you change your mind...”

Sonic exchanges a look with him and rubs his arms self-consciously. When did Tails start acting more mature than him? Was he always like this and he hadn’t noticed? “Yeah... I’ll keep that in mind,” Sonic mumbles before walking out.

Sonic only catches the “Are you seriously going to just let him leave--?” from Amy before he warps out of there.

He teleports back to the apartment and looks around. He frowns when he notices Shadow isn’t there. He walks over to the counter and sees the note indicating that Shadow has gone ‘shopping.’ Sonic clenches his teeth because he knows what that means. He’s investigating Sonic’s situation.

At first, he thought it was cool that Shadow would swoop in and save him, but now it just feels like he can't trust him.

He crumples up the paper and tosses it at the trash bin. It hits the rim and falls on the ground. Sonic stomps his foot in irritation, but doesn't bother with it. He drags his feet over to the couch and rolls onto it, letting his legs hang off the headrest as he turns the tv on. He's well aware everything is upside down, but he doesn't much care because he's not watching it anyway. Instead, he just daydreams about going on an adventure and grinding down metal beams onto heavily armed fortresses and kicking butt.

He nods off to the fantasy and the remote slips from his hand, falling to the ground.

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Sonic wakes to the sensation of floating. Back and forth like he's on waves. He opens his eyes and looks up, seeing Shadow. He looks down and realizes Shadow is holding him and walking toward the bedroom.

Sonic closes his eyes. Great. He fell asleep on the couch again.

As he feels the mattress meet with his back, he opens his eyes again and stares up at Shadow. Shadow is looking back down at him with concern. He can tell Shadow wants him to tell him how it went.

Instead, Sonic turns away and asks, "What did you buy?"

Shadow gives him a confused look.

"You went shopping," Sonic reminds him.

"Oh," Shadow looks away with a calculative look like he's trying to think.

Sonic smirks. Shadow is the world's worst liar. That wasn't technically true. He was good at putting up fronts when it comes to missions or hiding who he really is. But when it comes to stuff like this? Atrocious.

"Tell me what you found out first and I'll let you know if you're right," Sonic finally says.

Shadow gives Sonic a defeated look before climbing onto the bed next to him, "I do it because I care."

"I know," Sonic says softly.

Shadow leans his back against the headrest of the bed and folds his hands neatly in his lap as he explains, "Whatever happened with your team, you did a clean job at it. No leads at all. Completely off GUN's radar. It's almost as if someone could tell what was going to happen before it did and swooped in prior to anyone being the wiser."

Sonic just nods slowly, but doesn't say anything even though he can see Shadow waiting for him to explain. "It isn't my problem anymore," is all Sonic tells him.

Shadow's brow lowers, "What do you mean?"

"It's exactly what it sounds like, Shads," Sonic responds stubbornly.

"You decided to thrust your duties onto someone else?" Shadow asks as if he's appalled by the

revelation.

“Yep,” Sonic replies, even popping his lips together around the ‘p.’

“You are the leader of the Freedom Fighters,” Shadow reminds him sternly.

“I sure am,” Sonic states, pulling his legs up to his chest.

“How could you be so irresponsible?” Shadow asks with grit to his voice, “Others rely on you. You need to be able to—“

“Does it matter anymore!?” Sonic shouts and narrows his eyes at Shadow, “No matter what I do, it’s wrong! It’s irresponsible and childish and whatever else you wanna throw at me! Maybe it was a mistake to wanna marry you because you won’t see me as anything other than someone to take care of!” Sonic pulls himself out of bed and glares down at Shadow, “Be completely honest with me! Am I just a grown child you have to take care of!?”

Shadow gives him a blank look for the longest time and pulls himself out of bed as well. He stares at Sonic with concern as he asks carefully, “Do I really make you feel that way?”

Sonic goes to bite at a word, but he can’t answer. Instead, his anger just dissipates to sadness. He curls in on himself against the floor and whispers to himself, “No, I make myself feel like this.”

Shadow makes his way over to the blue hero and kneels down next to him. He smooths down the other’s stiff quills until they relax under his fingertips. He slowly watches Sonic uncurl from his fetal position. “Tell me what’s troubling you,” Shadow murmurs.

“Everything’s fine, okay?” Sonic grumbles, “Just peachy.”

Shadow sits down next to him on the floor. He guides Sonic back up to a sitting position with him. He takes Sonic’s hand and holds it up in the air in front of him. “Pretend you’re holding your fame, your leadership, and your heroic identity in your hand,” Shadow tells him.

Sonic reluctantly does it and nods, “Kay.”

“Now,” Shadow continues and pretends to take the invisible idea within his grip, “Throw that away.” He acts as if he tosses it to the side before he finishes, “Now, talk to me like you are your own person. Tell me what is bothering *you*.”

“Some girl from the future apparently knows me as a Legendary Hero and brought a kid here and needs me to protect it,” Sonic whispers.

Shadow looks at him like he’s not following.

“It sounds unbelievable, I know,” Sonic says with a laugh.

“I’m an immortal being that was born 50 years ago. It doesn’t sound unbelievable to me,” Shadow clarifies, “I’m more confused as to why you find that troubling.”

“You want a second snotty kid in your apartment?” Sonic asks with disgust.

“*Our* apartment,” Shadow points out clearly for him, “and if it’s part of your heroic obligation I might be more lenient.”

“Hm,” Sonic hums out, “Shoulda told you it was a heroic obligation when I brought home that stray cat.”



Shadow gives him a hard stare.

“I’m kidding. I’m kidding,” Sonic holds his hands up in defeat. They’re silent for a moment before Sonic asks, “Do you think it’s noticeable yet?”

Shadow glances at the hero. He frowns as if he’s missed what they were talking about.

“I stopped aging after I turned eighteen,” Sonic clarifies sadly, “I noticed everyone else growing up. It feels really weird.”

Shadow nods slowly, “I grew up aboard the ARK. I noticed that I could grow and age as well. It wasn’t so strange with Maria since she was older than me, but Abraham...” Shadow trails off and shakes his head, “Seeing a kid I once knew from my past again as a 60 year old man, and my boss, is rather strange.”

Sonic swallows and frowns, “Y-yeah, I guess it’s probably weirder for you, huh?”

“That does not mean your feelings are invalid,” Shadow points out. He rests his hand onto Sonic’s and continues, “We’re in this together. I’ve noticed it as well. It’s a hard concept to get accustomed to.”

“I feel like it won’t take long for my friends to figure it out,” Sonic says under his breath.

Shadow looks down, “And you don’t want them to know.”

“I kinda wanna pretend like I’m not whatever I am,” Sonic explains, “I don’t wanna know. I feel like if I find out something bad will happen. I just wanna live my life.”

Shadow squeezes his hand, “Whatever happens... I just want you to be aware that I’ll be here for you like you had with me.”

Sonic ends up leaning against Shadow’s shoulder. He closes his mind off, not wanting to think about it anymore. Exhaustion takes a hold of him once more and he can vaguely feel Shadow shift and carrying him to bed.

He doesn’t even fight it this time.

# Freefall



## Chapter Three: Freefall

When his eyes open again, the sun has gone down. Without the surge of anger or anxiety in his system, he feels just how sore he actually is. He groans and rolls over.

He must have looked uncomfortable while he was sleeping because there's a glass of water and an aspirin on the nightstand. Sonic swallows his pride and the pill, waiting for it to kick in before actually getting up.

When he walks across the living room and into the kitchen area, he sees Shadow sitting at the table with the light on reading the newspaper. There's a pan on the stove with the lid on it.

"How long was I out for?" Sonic asks as he makes his way over to the kitchen table. He goes to sit, winces, and eases down.

Shadow glances up at the clock as he gets up, "About four or five hours." A few clanks are heard and it's safe to say he's preparing a plate for Sonic. After a few minutes, he places it in front of the hero and continues, "I contacted your brother. Once you're more awake I believe we should head over there."

Sonic lowers his brow like he doesn't like that idea. He takes a fork and twirls it around the noodles in front of him. It's chili spaghetti. Something he had made as a freak accident while mixing up leftover spaghetti sauce for the chili. It was actually pretty good so they tend to make it from time to time now.

“I think this will do you some good,” Shadow continues through Sonic’s thick silence, “I don’t think it’s good to be alone here. I can tell it’s a hard transition for you to go from a high energy lifestyle to a domestic setting.”

Sonic rolls his eyes and rests his hand to his cheek, “Can you go one day without psychoanalyzing me?”

“All I’m saying is that being motivated to take care of something other than yourself can take your mind off a lot of things,” Shadow explains, “I will aid in your—“

“No,” Sonic frantically shakes his head, “No, please, don’t! I don’t want any more help from you!” Just the thought of it makes Sonic’s knee bounce. He stops once he realizes he’s doing it too. He taps his fork against the plate in a repeated motion instead and asks, “How come I can run at the speed of sound, break the sound barrier, jump off a plane, parkour up a falling building, traverse an active volcano, and rail grind on the outer reaches of the Earth’s atmosphere; but I can’t handle *this*?”

Shadow notices the longing look in Sonic’s eyes and can tell he’s delving into those daydreams again.

“Is it bad that sometimes I think about heading over to Prison Island and busting Eggman out so I have something to do?” Sonic asks, realizing that it sounds crazier when he says it out loud. He smacks his head against the table when he sees Shadow’s look of complete shock. “Sorry, I just feel like everything I am is so superficial now. My face is on merchandise and people want my autograph, but do I even deserve it anymore? I haven’t even worked for it.”

“You spent ten years of your life earning that title,” Shadow reminds him, “And I thought you were tired of fighting.”

Sonic slowly lifts his head from the table and gives him a grim tone, “Yeah, I know. I said that. But it’s like spending a good chunk of your life working one job and then being like ‘Haha! See ya! I quit!’ And then sitting at home, staring at the ceiling, thinking about what you just did. It sounds like a good idea at the time until you realize you don’t have a game plan after that.”

Shadow just stares at him like he doesn’t understand, “So, let me get this straight. You want to fight for freedom, but freedom isn’t your main goal? You always talk about wanting to live your life freely, but that isn’t what you want?”

“My whole identity is being a hero,” Sonic states, “If I’m not doing that...” Sonic buries his face in his hands and starts laughing, “Oh no...”

Shadow looks more confused than ever, “Sonic?”

“I’m having a midlife crisis in my twenties,” Sonic says through his laughter.

Shadow wants to point out that there really isn’t a midlife for them since their immortals, but he keeps quiet about it because he knows Sonic is kind of losing it right now.

“I don’t know? I think you’re doing pretty well,” Shadow remarks with a slight smirk, “At least you didn’t have one when you were sixteen.”

Sonic bursts into laughter, laughing deep and hard until he can feel it in his diaphragm.

Sonic ultimately agrees to going to Tails’ after he’s finished eating. He pointedly says that that doesn’t mean he’s going to take the kid home. He just figures it’ll be easier to talk about this specific issue with Shadow grounding him.

Shadow warps them over to Tails' workshop and they walk inside like it's second nature. Sonic is pouting behind Shadow the whole time, but Tails is still happy to see them.

"I'm glad you two could stop by," Tails says as he guides them over to the living area.

Sonic gets a nostalgic feeling when he sits on the familiar cushions and he kind of misses living with his bro. He knows Tails is only fourteen, but he acts so much older than that. Sonic sometimes worries about him living alone, but Amy frequently visits and by the looks of how clean everything is he'd say Tails was doing pretty well.

Which kind of makes him feel worse.

Tails walks up to Sonic and offers the baby to him, "Wanna hold him?"

Sonic shrinks back against the cushions a bit and looks really unsure.

Shadow sees this and holds his arms out instead, "May I?"

Tails nods and hands it to him carefully. It's a smooth transfer and Shadow is supporting the little body with his arms. Sonic tries to pretend he's not staring, but he totally is.

Shadow is staring down at the child with a concentrated look. Sonic wonders what he's thinking about. He usually only makes a face like that when he's lost in thought about something.

Tails starts to go on about his upcoming projects. Sonic doesn't seem to be too interested until he brings up how he pulled out the old Tornado and spruced it up. Sonic's eyes get huge when he hears that and Tails grins at him and asks him if he wants to go for a spin on it.

Sonic jumps to his feet in joy, but stops when he looks down at Shadow. Shadow just waves him off and nods his head stating that he'll look after the kid while they do their thing. He figures it will preoccupy Sonic for a bit.

Sonic helps Tails set up the plane in the workshop and Sonic hops on the wing, feeling his chest thunder with excitement. He looks back at Shadow who is watching from the porch and gives him a thumbs up. Shadow rolls his eyes, but shoots him a salute back.

Tails starts up the engine and aligns the track upwards. It's a steady motion before it shoots off. It dips down from the track and then sails off into the sky.

Sonic leans down, gripping one hand on the side of the plane and breathing in the fresh ocean air. He closes his eyes and takes in the feeling of the air whipping across his face. He lives for this. The sky's the limit.

After he's done basking in the freedom of it, he gets up to his feet. He recoils back and then dashes off the side of the wing. He cries out in excitement as his body freefalls and he flips a few times. He watches as Tails angles the plane under him and Sonic's feet meet with the wing of the plane again.

"Another!" Sonic shouts down to Tails, "but angle the plane to the side!"

"Gotcha!" Tails says back. The plane soars back up into the air higher and Tails angles it a bit to the left.

Sonic rubs his hands together excitedly as he sees the wing shift into a ramp. He reels back and then spin dashes. He flies high into the air and uncurls. The momentum has him falling and flipping faster than before. Sonic feels the laughter bubbling up in his chest as he feels weightless.

He closes his eyes and thinks about his body falling. How his quills move in the wind. How the air rushes past his limbs. And just how quiet and tranquil it is this high in the air.

But then, he thinks about Chaos and how his body morphed into a large serpent monster destroying the city. He thinks about the vast water below him. He thinks about how his heart fused with Chaos' soul. He thinks about being immortal and his friends getting older and him staying the same. He thinks about what the future holds and how he must play a bigger role in it.

He suddenly doesn't feel like he's free falling, but more like he's spinning out of control. His eyes shoot open and he sees the plane under him. He's too late to grab it though and he smacks into the wing, hurdling off the side. He looks up at the plane getting smaller and smaller out of his reach. His arms flail a little and looks down at the deep blue ocean under him.

"Chaos..."

Sonic closes his eyes with anger because he knows. He just *knows* what's going to happen.

"...Control!"

The moment his feet are on solid ground, he knows. He pushes away from Shadow and walks away. He misjudges the hill and stumbles a bit, but keeps walking.

"Sonic!"

He hears Shadow's voice and turns to him. He sees the child in his arms and the ring on his finger itches. He feels a little dizzy and his chest kind of closes up. He hears the plane coming in for a quick landing and the wind whips around them.

"Nice save, Shadow!" Tails calls out. He jumps out of the plane before it even has a chance to cool down and he lands in front of Sonic, "You okay? I must have miscalculated your trajectory."

Sonic gives him a wavering look, but settle on a smile. "It's cool. Don't sweat it, bro," Sonic says before turning to leave.

"Where are you going?" Tails calls out to him.

"Just goin' for a run! See ya!" Sonic shouts back as he waves him off, quickly disappearing behind a cloud of dust.

Tails watches him go with a frown and turns to Shadow, "I'm so sorry we bothered him on his time off. Do you think he resents us for it?"

"I don't think that's it," Shadow states calmly, "He's... fickle."

Tails nods slowly like he knows, "He gets so... nervous around me lately. I'm not sure what it is. It never used to be like this."

Shadow frowns. He wants to tell Tails about the immortality thing, but he knows Sonic is extremely against that. He just wishes Sonic would at least tell his brother because he has a way of making Sonic feel better in ways Shadow can't. He also believes Sonic's friends have the right to know too. Sonic is just really against anything squandering the perfect image he's built for himself. Shadow has gotten to know Tails a bit more and knows that nothing Sonic has to hide will change how he feels about him. That's just how he is. Tails has always admired Sonic no matter what.

It was just a shame.

"I'll take care of the child," Shadow announces to him.

Tails gives him a surprised look, "Are you sure?"

Shadow nods with certainty, "It's probably not wise to burden Sonic with this right now. The child will be safe in my care. You have my word."

Tails nods, "Alright. Thank you, Shadow." He guides Shadow back inside so he can give him the supplies the Freedom Fighters have pitched in to get. He explains that it isn't everything. Just some clothes, food, and spare diapers.

Shadow thanks him and tells him that's all he'll need until he buys the rest.

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Sonic spends a good portion of the night hopping from building to building trying to stick landings. He's still so angry that he missed the wing of the plane and it was humiliating to have to be saved by Shadow.

Again.

If he was some god and some legendary hero or whatever it didn't feel like it. If anything, wouldn't that be Shadow? He was the Ultimate Life Form.

He shakes that thought from his head and gets another running start. He jumps from the rooftop he's on and angles himself over, running down it. He rushes down in a flash and sticks the landing and skids across the ground.

Yeah, that was more like it.

He glances up at a large billboard showing the time on it and it's almost one in the morning. He hadn't realized how long he was out for. Then again, he doesn't much care because time never seemed like a thought in his mind before. He'd move with time. Never against it.

Except recently it's felt like time was moving a lot faster. Faster than he can handle and that concept is strange to him.

He makes his way back to the apartment regardless. He scales the building and jumps each gap, feeling the wind against his face. He slides down and lands on the windowsill where the kitchen is. He opens it and tumbles inside, landing on his feet.

"I'd give that landing a 10/10," he hears Shadow's voice from the living room. The dark hero is glancing back at him from over his shoulder as he sits on the sofa.

"Haha! You know me. Always aim to please," Sonic shoots him some finger guns. Before he gets a chance to summersault onto the couch next to him, he looks down in horror.

The baby is sleeping on a blanket next to Shadow's side. Its eyes are closed and a binky is half hanging out of its mouth.

"What is that *thing* doing here?" Sonic asks frantically, "I told ya I wasn't taking care of it!"

Shadow places his hand in the air to silence him and gives Sonic a hard stare, "I volunteered to look after him."

Sonic's face twists in disgust, "If this is your way of getting me to take care of it..."

Shadow folds his arms across his chest and glares at him, "I assure you that's not my motive and if you don't believe me you may go back to living with your brother. I have my own reasons."

Sonic's mouth snaps shut when he hears that and looks away. Sonic climbs onto the armrest on the other side of Shadow and pouts, "Okay, Shads. Fill me in on these 'reasons' then." The air quotes are strong with him as his fingers physically move around the word.

Shadow sighs and looks down at the child. "Observe the dark patterns around his eyes," Shadow states as he points to the black that lines the outer portion of the eyes. "The white fur that flares up from his chest and around to his shoulders," he continues as he gestures to the baby's chest. His finger delicately lingers on the five spikes on the forehead, "Also, the quill pattern on his head remind me disturbingly like Doom's eye. Black Doom's third eye."

"Dude, I think you're over thinking it," Sonic explains coolly, "Black Arms were just that: Black. That kid's white."

Shadow makes a noise of agreement, but continues anyway, "I was also a white hedgehog before Gerald inserted Black Doom's DNA into me."

"Wait, what!?" Sonic asks in confusion.

Shadow takes Sonic's hand into his and rests it against the white patch of fur on his chest, "This was the one thing Black Doom's DNA was unable to corrupt. Which is why he could not control me."

"Okay... But how does that explain why the kid isn't black," Sonic questions.

"I don't know," Shadow whispers thoughtfully, "If what you're saying is true and this child is from the future, perhaps someone has found a way of taking my DNA and Black Doom's and creating a stable amalgamation of the two." Shadow points to the futuristic ring inhibitors around the child's wrists and ankles, "Take note of those too. That technology is far more advance than ours. You can see the chaos energy flowing through them and stabilizing it."

Sonic just stares at them and then back at Shadow, "How did you even notice all of this?"

"Merely observation," Shadow states.

"Okay..." Sonic says slowly, like he has a feeling there's more to it.

"You aren't required to care for him," Shadow tells him when he sees Sonic's hesitant look, "And... this was not part of our agreement. So, if you're having second thoughts about being my life partner..."

"Can you stop acting like my proposal is part of a business contract," Sonic responds with offense.

"You're extremely against this," Shadow points out.

Sonic grits his teeth. He jumps off the armrest and gives him an irritated look, "I'm not against it. I'm *conflicted*. It's a lot to take in. I'm just freaking out!"

This stirs the child awake as it makes small whines. Before it can start screaming though, Shadow scoops the child in his arms and places the binky securely in his mouth again as he rocks it. Luckily, it calms back down and lulls its eyes back closed.

Shadow exchanges a look with Sonic and continues in a low tone, "Then, take as much time as you need. In the meantime, I'm going to try and set up everything here. Perhaps I can request some more

time off or get Amy to look after him while I'm at work."

"Amy!?" Sonic shouts, but winces when he sees the kid stirring again. He continues a bit more quietly, "Why Amy?"

"She has experience with taking care of children and she's also a excellent fighter so she'll be able to protect him," Shadow points out.

Sonic just stares daggers at him. He feels kind of betrayed by this. "Great. Even *Amy* has a better roster of skills than me," Sonic seethes.

"Sonic..." Shadow says in a pleading tone.

"No, no. You made your point. I get it. I'll just go live with my bro then," Sonic grits out, knowing full well how childish he sounds.

"My intention was never to make a point," Shadow sighs, "And I'm not insinuating *anything*."

"Yeah?" Sonic says with a huff, "Well, you're acting like a callus jerk." Sonic turns away sharply and marches into the bedroom, slamming the door behind him.

Sonic just ends up pacing back and forth vigorously until leaving out the bedroom window. He can't sleep anymore today. He's wired and his emotions are buzzing under his skin. He doesn't want to think about any of this. He just wants to block it out.

He doesn't want it catching up to him. He just wants to keep moving forward.



# An Outing



## Chapter Four: An Outing

Sonic decides to go back after he watches the sunrise on top of the temple of Mystic Ruins. He just needed somewhere out in the open and away from the real world for awhile. The city can feel so cold and cramped sometimes.

When he returns, he sneaks back in through the bedroom window and sees that Shadow never went to bed last night. He pouts a little. The guy didn't even know he left. Not that he cared or anything.

Sonic creeps back into the living room. Shadow is asleep in the same sitting position he saw him in the night prior with a protective arm around the child acting like a guard so he doesn't fall off the sofa. Sonic has no idea how he could sleep in that position. He's getting a neck cramp just looking at him.

Sonic squints his eyes and sees that the kid is moving around a little and babbling. He looks around before creeping over to the couch. He sits down on the carpet and just stares at it. He's giving it the stink eye and mentally blaming it for his currently strained relationship with Shadow.

The baby opens its mouth and the binky falls from it. It turns over and clasps its little baby hands around Shadow's ring inhibitor before gnawing at it.

Sonic makes a disgusted face and whispers, "Get that out of your mouth."

The baby in turn gives Sonic a sassy look before gnawing on it more.

Sonic gives him an angry grimace before grabbing the binky. He pushes the kid away from the ring and stuffs the binky in its mouth, "Get your gross baby gums off Shadow."

The kid spits the binky out at Sonic and rolls over to suck on Shadow's ring inhibitor again.

Sonic fumbles with the binky and gags when he sees the long trail of spit on it. His face twists into a scowl and pulls the baby away again and shoves the binky back into its mouth quick as lightning.

The kid blinks like he's star-struck and has no idea what just happened.

Sonic snickers, "Haha. You lose. Nothing's faster than me."

"Are you having fun?" He hears Shadow's voice say from above him.

Sonic jolts back and gets to his feet, "No, It's dumb. It keeps putting its disgusting mouth on your ring inhibitors."

"He's a child. He doesn't know any better," Shadow attempts to explain.

"Yeah, well... If he pulls them off then..." Sonic starts to say.

"I doubt he has enough strength to do so yet," Shadow counters before Sonic can even finish, "Besides..." Shadow glances down at the baby and how it's already replaced its binky with Shadow's inhibitor, "I find it comforting that someone isn't afraid of them. He has no context of the world around him. Therefore, he cannot discern what is a threat and what isn't. He sees my inhibitors as a mere toy as opposed to something that can bring destruction."

Sonic frowns and looks down, feeling a little bad. He shakes it off and heads into the kitchen, "Whatever. I'm starved."

As Shadow goes to speak again, Sonic stops midstep, "You know, you were right. I was being too callus with you. It's our time off and we haven't even done anything for us. We should do something together."

Sonic feels the warmth in his chest and turns to smile at him, "Yeah?"

Shadow nods back.

"I'd like that a lot, Shads," Sonic responds, his eyes glistening a little with happiness. He turns back around, wraps his arms around Shadow's neck from behind and kisses him on the temple.

Shadow hums back at the notion and turns his head, kissing Sonic on the lips softly. He lifts a hand up Sonic's face and angles it closer to deepen the kiss.

Sonic melts into it and when their lips part, he's staring down at Shadow with half-lidded eyes.

"There's one errand we must run first and then we can go wherever you like," Shadow bargains.

Sonic nods, seeing that as a fair agreement. He nuzzles his face close to Shadow's playfully as he negotiates back, "Fine, but you're buying breakfast then."

"Done," Shadow agrees with a slight smile.

"Alright!" Sonic shouts with excitement. He attacks Shadow with kisses to which Shadow does a poor job fending himself off from.

Sonic then rushes into the bathroom announcing that he needs a shower. It was a new day and he wants to make the most of it. He doesn't want anything from the days before lingering with him.

He's giddy the whole time he's under the spray of water. Once he's finished, he spin dries himself and bursts out of the shower curtain. He lands in a pirouette and wipes the steam off the mirror. He smirks and gives himself finger guns as he sees the sheen across his quills, "Lookin' good, Sonic!" He realizes he's talking to himself and feels kind of stupid, but he doesn't really care because he was going out with Shadow today. Nothing could drag down his good mood.

He rushes back into the bedroom and digs through his closet until he finds what he's looking for. It's his soap shoes, the ones he was wearing the first time he met Shadow. He pulls them on and taps them in place and poses with them in front of the mirror.

He was as happy as a giddy kid on Christmas.

He rushes out of the bedroom and back into the living room like Shadow is the present underneath the Christmas tree and poses for him, "Lookin' sharp, huh?"

Shadow looks him over and smirks, "Very. Bringing back a classic."

"I *am* a classic," Sonic retorts with a smug look, "That's how well renown I am!"

Shadow just shakes his head, but lets out a low laugh anyway. Shadow stands up, baby in one arm and it's drooling face pressed against his chest as he makes his way over to the kitchen where his black work bag is hung up.

Sonic raises an eyebrow when he sees him putting the baby supplies into it and blinks down at the GUN logo. "Uh..." Sonic starts to say, but stops himself.

Shadow halts his movement and looks up at him, "Yes?"

"You're... really gunna put that stuff in a military bag?" Sonic asks hesitantly.

"It's the only one I own," Shadow confirms.

Sonic taps his foot on the ground and tries his best not to care, but he feels kind of off about walking around with a military bag as a diaper bag. He holds up his finger, "Just... uh... Wait here." He zips back into the bedroom and shuffles through his belonging until he finds his small backpack. He returns to Shadow's side and with his back facing him, the unzipped bag presented to him.

"And you're alright carrying this stuff?" Shadow asks.

Sonic just laughs, "Yeah, why wouldn't I? It's no big deal. Besides, it makes me look cool and matches my shoes."

A soft smile spreads across Shadow's face as he nods back, "Alright then. I appreciate it."

Shadow begins to pack the supplies away into Sonic's backpack. They head down the stairs and try to ignore the weird looks some of their neighbors are giving them. As they get onto the streets though, people start coming up to Sonic and asking him about 'his kid.' He has to tell them it isn't his and quickly begs Shadow to warp them out of the city as soon as possible.

They end up in a diner on the outskirts of town and Sonic breathes a sigh of relief when there are barely any patrons inside. They get a booth table and Sonic swings his legs happily when the waitress brings him his orange juice. He drinks it down happily, but watches as Shadow shuffles

through the backpack for a container of baby food, a small rubber spoon, and a bib. He angles the baby on his thigh after clipping the bib around its neck.

Shadow has a concentrated look on his face when he goes to angle the spoon into the kid's mouth. He frowns when he sees it turn away. He angles it around toward its mouth again, but the baby turns back the other way. He gives the child a quizzical look. "I don't understand," Shadow whispers as he tries again and fails.

Sonic sees how much trouble Shadow is having and tries to ignore it. When he sees the kid smack the spoon out of his hand and it projectiles across the table onto Sonic's face, that's when he refuses to ignore it.

He wipes his face off with a napkin and picks up the spoon. He walks over to the other side of the booth and sits next to the two. "You gotta open your mouth, lil broski," Sonic tells him as he reaches for the baby food container and scoops more into the spoon. He angles it toward the kid's mouth again as he opens his own mouth wide.

The baby looks up at Sonic's mouth and then down at the spoon. He gives it a grumpy look before opening its mouth. Sonic quickly stuffs the spoon in the baby's mouth before he can close it again. The baby moves the food around his mouth messily.

"C'mon. You gotta keep it in your mouth, broski," Sonic says with a pout. He scoops the food that's dribbling down its chin back into its mouth and makes chewing motions with his own mouth.

Shadow is looking away and trying to stifle a laugh.

Sonic notices it, "Hey, it's not funny!"

Shadow covers his mouth and composes himself, "No, it's just..."

Sonic gives him a hard stare and waits for his response.

"...kind of cute," Shadow finishes quieter.

Sonic's face turns beat red and he almost drops the spoon. He's never heard Shadow call anything cute. Well, without being condescending about it. He avoids making eye contact with him, but he does feel his heart stutter in his chest a bit.

He continues to spoon the mushy food in the baby's mouth even after his own food arrives. He kind of ignores it too because he's too focused on making airplane noises which causes the kid to laugh uncontrollably. He gets Shadow to laugh too, even though the dark hero completely denies it, when he put his hand over his mouth muffling his voice like he's talking into a radio, "Sonic to Shadow. Do you read me? We have a visual on our target. We're coming in for a landing."

When Sonic finally gets to his own food, he's upset that it's cold; but he tries to suck it up because there's a full day ahead of him. Things do feel a bit lighter though. Like something's lifted from his chest.

The errand Shadow was referring to was shopping for the remainder of the supplies for the baby. Which Sonic thought he'd be oppose to, but it was actually kind of fun checking off everything on the list.

"People are staring," Shadow informs Sonic.

Sonic is pushing the cart with the baby hedgehog securely fastened in the baby seat. "Well, I don't

know, Shadow? It's probably because you're carrying a box twice your size with one hand over your head like it's nothing," Sonic jokes with a snicker.

"Your cellular device informed us that we needed to acquire a crib so the child can have a secure place to sleep," Shadow side glances the hero with a scowl, "And it doesn't fit in the cart."

Sonic folds his arms across the handle of the cart and pillows his chin as he sighs, "First of all, stop calling my phone a cellular device. And second, we could have picked it up on our way out."

"That's absurd," Shadow shoots back, "I'm not walking across this damn place a second time if I can just carry it."

Sonic flails his arms up and covers the baby's ears, "Dude, you can't swear in front of the kid."

Shadow just blinks at him before muttering, "Oh..."

"Alright," Sonic pulls his cell back out and scrolls through it, "So, we'll probably need more diapers and baby powder and wipes and stuff, right?"

Shadow gives him an unsure look, "Okay."

"Wait. Where did you get all the supplies you already had?" Sonic asks with confusion.

"Your... brother," Shadow responds.

"You don't know how to take care of a baby either?" Sonic asks, "Didn't you... ya know, take care of Maria on the ARK?"

"She wasn't a baby," Shadow seethes back.

"Why did you volunteer then?" Sonic demands.

"Because I *know* he's part of me," Shadow grumbles, "I felt... obligated. I thought we already discussed this."

Sonic just makes a face and looks back down at his phone like he doesn't want to deal with it, but when he does he sees the baby chewing on the phone case. "Ugh..." Sonic slips it away from the baby's mouth and makes a disgusted face at how moist it is.

"Just focus and figure out what we need so we can get out of here," Shadow states impatiently.

"Yeah, yeah," Sonic glances at his phone and then back at the baby. He wipes the spit off his phone case against the fabric of the kid's onesie and glances down at the screen again, "Oh... Should we get a highchair?"

"What purpose does it serve?" Shadow asks with a hand on his hip.

"It's like... uh... a seat with a table? It's easier to feed him with it," Sonic tries to explain.

"If it's for convince," Shadow nods, "then, yes."

Sonic just sighs because Shadow will probably have to carry that too considering the size of it. They manage to get the things they need though even if it takes them longer than it needs too.

Sonic rolls the cart up to the cashier when their done and the lady swoons at the baby as she rings them up. Although, when Shadow tries to place the larger items on the counter it scares the living

daylights out of her. Sonic has to help Shadow angle it so the lady can scan it with the laser scanner. She asks them if they need assistance with hauling the larger items to 'their car,' to which Shadow just picks them back up with one hand and declines the offer.

Shadow holds his other hand out to Sonic so he can take the bagged items, "Wait here. I'll drop these off at home and we'll continue our day as planned."

"Alright, Shads," Sonic hooks the bags across Shadow's arm and waves him off before he warps out of the store.

The lady behind the counter just ducks and looks like she's about to call the police.

Sonic gives her a sheepish look before he winces. He looks down at the baby and notices a rank smell coming from it. He groans and turns back to the lady and asks where the bathrooms are. She shakily points toward the back of the store and Sonic thanks her, zipping past her fast as the wind.

Sonic marches into the men's bathroom and notes the lack of a changing station inside. He carefully walks back out and sees the one that says 'Family' on it. He glares down at the child and whispers, "This means nothing." Before he walks inside and locks the door.

When he sees the changing station, he breathes a sigh of relief. He clicks it down and hooks the kid into the little seatbelt. He frantically scrolls through his phone to find a video on how to change a diaper and sets it down on the counter facing him as he rolls up his sleeves. He carefully watches step-by-step how to do it. Yeah, it takes him a few tries and he wastes a perfectly good diaper trying to put it on correctly, but he manages to figure it out. He's just glad to be rid of that awful smell.

He clips the little onsie back in place and picks the kid up by the armpits, "How's that feel?"

The kid responds with babbles and bubbles sputtering from its mouth.

"Yeah, yeah. I know I'm amazing," Sonic responds smugly to himself.

He pushes out the door and hurries back to the front of the store. Shadow is waiting for them with a hard stare.

"Where have you been?" Shadow asks and Sonic can tell he's doing his best to hold back his anger.

Sonic gives him a snarky look, "He needed his diaper changed. It smelled worse than the exhaust systems on Eggman's fleets."

"Oh," Shadow immediately looks guilty for even thinking about losing his temper. "Thank you," he says a bit embarrassed, "I could have..."

"No sweat," Sonic says like it's nothing as he gives him a victory pose, "Tutorial videos saved my life yet again."

"Do you think you can show me... next time it happens," Shadow whispers.

"Course, Shads," Sonic responds as he passes the kid back over to Shadow and flips the collar up on his jacket in an attempt to look cool.

Shadow sends him a well contained smile and they walk out of the building together. When he asks Sonic what's next, the blue hero deflates a little. He wanted to do something, but the baby is bringing twice as much attention to them than usual. And not the good kind of attention he loves to bask in. It's the awkward looks and questions kind.

Shadow looks Sonic over for a moment before racking his mind. He thinks he understands though. He holds his hand out for the hero and when he takes it, he warps them away from the city.

When Sonic looks around, he realizes he's in a field of flowers as far as the eye can see with mountains rising up on the horizon. He gives Shadow a wide eyed look and asks, "What is this place?"

"I came here with GUN years back. It used to be a battlefield. Nothing, but ash and smoldering embers. One of Eggman's bombs went off here and we never thought this land would be restored. I came back though and noticed under the soot and ashes, life was sprouting through the remains," Shadow looks out at the flowers dancing delicately against the gentle breeze, "That's when I realizes that life was resilient. There's always something that can be salvaged from a disaster."

Sonic looks back at Shadow who is completely immersed in his thoughts. He can't help, but feel like he's referring to the child in his arms. The way Sonic sees it though is that Shadow was the one good thing that rose up from his own tragic past. He could have been used and killed, but he decided to keep fighting for justice and what he loved. He led his life with his heart and that's what Sonic really admires about him.

When Sonic goes to take Shadow's hand and the dark hero turns to look at him, he knows Shadow can see his thoughts reflecting back into his eyes. Sonic smiles up at him before letting it fall slightly when Shadow pulls him in and kisses him. He lets their lips meld together as he places a comforting hand on Shadow's face. Sonic feels the small streak of a tear there, but Shadow holds the kiss firmly until he takes a deep breath and composes himself.

"You were my guiding light," Shadow whispers to him.

"Nah, you did all of that on your own," Sonic tells him with a smile.

"No," Shadow shakes his head, "I would have walked down a completely different path without you. I was trapped in darkness."

"I dunno about that," Sonic tells him as he places his hand to the white fur on his chest, "Can't cast a shadow without there being a little light, right?"

Shadow's face drops a little when he takes in Sonic's words, but feels the warmth blooming in his chest from where Sonic's hand is. He places his hand upon Sonic's and lifts it to his lips to kiss his knuckles, "Right."

Sonic shrugs off his back pack and pulls out the small blanket. Shadow helps him smooth it down against the bed of flowers and rests the baby atop it. The kid sees the flowers overhanging and reaches its small arms up to try and touch and grab them, but they're just out of reach.

Sonic snickers at it and turns to Shadow as he holds his fist out, "Let's give this kid a bright future."

Shadow sees the gesture and gives it an exasperated look before lightly tapping his fist against Sonic's. Even after years of dating, Sonic hasn't given up his buddy-buddy nature. He actually doesn't mind it as much as he lets on. He does agree though that he wants to give this kid a bright future and something to look forward to.

"Should we... give him a name?" Shadow asks like he's not sure.

"Oh," Sonic taps his finger to his chin like he hadn't even thought about it, "I don't know if anyone mentioned anything about a name."

Shadow stares down at the child and how it's iridescent quills almost glow against the sunlight. He looks up as the clouds lazily march across the sky. The sheen of light illuminates the edges of their form. He stares at it thoughtfully before whispering, "Silver."

"Aw. I was thinking something along the lines of Stardust Shimmer Sparkle," Sonic comments with a laugh as his hand gestures up to the sky as if it's posted on an imaginary billboard.

"Doesn't exactly strike fear into his future enemies hearts, now does it?" Shadow retaliates.

"Future enemies?" Sonic rolls his eyes, "What about giving him a bright future? And also, I was joking, Shadow. Geez." Sonic rolls onto his stomach and pokes the kid's belly playfully enjoying its laughter in response, "Silver's a good name. Sounds like a car model, but I'll look past that."

"Unlike the shadow I cast against your light, he'll be the one reflecting it," Shadow whispers softly, "I know you don't want anything to do with him, but I hope he can look up to you and follow in your footsteps rather than mine."

Sonic looks up at dark hero with sad eyes, "Shadow..."

Things were starting to make sense now. He never would have expected Shadow to accept the task of taking care of a kid without a second thought, but it's clear now that he wants to give it the life he never had as forgiveness for the things he's done wrong in his past. Sonic's heart clenches at the thought of it.

Shadow snaps off the flower Silver is trying to grab at and he tucks it behind the kid's ear and watches him trying to control his motor skills enough to reach for it. He smiles lightly before it falls away, "It's hard to let go of the past. I know I said I've put it behind me, but the memories still lay dormant. Like intrusive ghosts in my mind. I feel so much pain and regret for what I've done. It stops me from living in the present with you sometimes. It's a struggle to try and rip the husk away from my heart so I can open it to you, but it builds up again and again and I become... callus."

Sonic slowly lifts himself off the ground and just exchanges a look with the dark hero.

"Perhaps this all says more about me than it does you," Shadow continues, "Perhaps it isn't about considering your feelings of comfort in spending an eternity by my side and more about how I'm struggling to fathom the thought of someone like you wanting to stand beside a monster. I..."

Sonic doesn't give him a chance to finish. Sonic's hands are tight against his face and his lips against Shadow is silencing the negative words pouring from his mouth. He wishes he could kiss the pain away. He wishes he could have been there for Shadow sooner. He wishes he could have done more. Seeing Shadow in so much pain was so hard to bare sometimes.

Slowly, he pulls away and whispers, "It's okay. You've more than made up for everything. I forgive you." A smile glides across his face once more, "All I ask of you now is to just smile and enjoy your life."

Shadow nods back, managing a sad smile.

"There it is," Sonic snickers as he leans in to kiss him once more, but softer this time.

Shadow wraps one arm around Sonic's waist and lets his other hand slide up the back of Sonic's head as he deepens the kiss. He holds the hero there and just takes in how real it feels. He clutches his hand against the fabric of the jacket and feels the ring against his finger like a small embrace of its own. A constant promise and reminder of their love.



“I love you,” Shadow murmurs against his lips.

“I love you too,” Sonic says back as he leans in against Shadow’s chest and rests his head on his shoulder. He looks down at the child laying next to them and how his eyes are closed in a peaceful slumber. He closes his eyes and tries not to think about the possibility of getting attached.

After awhile though, Sonic needs to get up and stretch his legs. He runs through the field, doing a few flips and landing in the flowers. They’re soft and they smell wonderful. All he wants to do is make a bed out of them.

He looks up at how the taller flowers frame around the sky in his vision. He grabs a few of the brightly colored ones and holds them up to his nose, each one having a different yet distinct scent to them. He pokes his head back out and sees that Shadow is lost in his thoughts again.

Sonic grins mischievously and carefully makes his way through the ocean of flowers as sneakily as he can, but the moment he goes to jump out he hears Shadow’s voice.

“I know you’re there,” Shadow says with a smirk.

Sonic pops out and surprises him anyway, tackling the ebony hero to the ground. By the way Shadow grips his hips to support him and falls against the soft ground, it doesn’t seem like he put up much of a fight. Sonic holds the flowers he found up to Shadow and asks, “Can you do that thing where you smash the flowers into a book when we get back?”

“It’s called flower pressing,” Shadow informs lightly, “And we can, but I need to put the crib together first.”

Sonic pouts.

“It won’t take long. I promise,” Shadow tells him.

“Alright,” Sonic finally agrees as he leans down to kiss him. He feels Shadow’s hand raise to the side of his face and the warmth from it heats up his cheeks a bit. As their lips part, he stares down at Shadow’s crimson eyes and just admires them. He hates how Amy’s words creep back into his mind and he looks away a bit embarrassed.

“What’s wrong?” Shadow asks.

“Do you uh...” Sonic stammers a bit before returning his gaze to Shadow, “like my eyes?”

A broader smile spreads across Shadow’s face and it causes Sonic to shiver a bit because of how rare it feels. “No,” Shadow whispers playfully.

“Aw,” Sonic’s face drops a bit.

“I love them,” Shadow clarifies as he hooks his arms around Sonic’s neck and reels him down lower, “Their luminosity alone gives me the intense desire to immerse myself within them completely.”

Sonic is taken back a bit by the reaction and he feels his face heating up more when Shadow’s hands take his hips into a firmer grip. “Y-yeah?” Sonic asks a bit nervously, feeling it’s hidden meaning heavily implied, but he’s not sure if it was intentional. It’s hard to tell with Shadow sometimes.

“Yes,” Shadow responds quietly as he lures Sonic in by lingering his lips close to his. He waits, basking in Sonic’s hesitant yet lustful eyes before connecting them. He feels the warm press of Sonic’s body getting closer to his and he smirks, separating their lips. Shadow looks back up at Sonic

with a look only reserved for the bedroom, “And do mine strike your fancy?”

Sonic leans down and buries his face into Shadow’s chest because... well, he doesn’t need a reason. You know, besides his brain short circuiting. “How do I like... say that they melt me into mush and burn the ashes without it sounding weird?”

Shadow buries his face into the blue spines and lets a laugh hum at his throat, “I think that’s adequate.” He guides Sonic’s head back up and places a kiss to his cheek. “Red looks good on you,” Shadow comments and they can both tell he’s not talking about his shoes or jacket.

Sonic tries his best to be angry at the comment, but just finds himself smiling and resting against Shadow’s chest. One hand stays on Shadow’s chest and the other splays out across the baby blanket. He’s enjoying the sound of Shadow’s heartbeat when he feels the slight tug against his finger. He looks over at the baby who is grasping at his hand like a toy and smiling widely at him. Sonic’s smile softens a little and moves his hand around a little for Silver to catch. Silver gives it a determined look and manages to catch it again. Sonic laughs under his breath in response.

Sonic looks back up at Shadow, but Shadow’s eyes are back on the child with the same soft smile.

Sonic blushes and whispers, “Ya know, he’s kinda cute.”

Shadow glances back at Sonic when he hears that.

“I mean, I could probably...” Sonic shrugs nervously and he already sees the surprised look on Shadow’s face before he finishes, “I could hang out with him while you’re at work and stuff.”

“Sonic...” Shadow says with concern.

“No, it’s cool,” Sonic responds with a carefree attitude, “I need something to fuss over anyway. It’ll take my mind off stuff.”

“That would help out greatly, but...” Shadow tries to say.

“Hey, it’s my responsibility, Shads. It’s selfish to let it all fall on you,” Sonic replies with a finality to his words, “You do enough for me.” He stops and murmurs under his breath stubbornly, “For us.”

“Only if you’re sure,” Shadow states carefully.

“Yeah, I’m sure,” Sonic nods confidently, “I think it’s more than the immortality thing that was freaking me out. I felt like I stopped aging mentally too and that’s why it was scary that everyone else was growing up without me.” Sonic gives Shadow his signature grin and announces, “But I’m Sonic the Hedgehog! I take leaps of faith in my sleep! No risk is too big for me!” He turns back to the kid and tickles his tummy, laughing with him, “And maybe Silvy can teach me a thing or two too. It’ll be a learning experience for all of us.”

Shadow nods back to him with a tranquil look.

“And Shadow?” Sonic continues with an embarrassment.

“Yes?” Shadow asks.

“I know I said I didn’t need your help, but...” Sonic says quietly, “I might need you to catch me when I fall.”

“Always,” Shadow lifts Sonic’s hand to his lips and kisses the ring on his finger, “No harm will ever

come to you so long as I'm here."

Sonic blushes harder and smiles wider. Maybe he really could get accustomed to these changes.

After a few hours, they decide to pack up and head back. Sonic occupies Silver while Shadow puts the crib together. Shadow's very precise with each piece and deems it finished only when he sees that it's sturdy enough for his liking. He sets it up in their bedroom for a lack of a better place to put it and frowns a bit.

He isn't here that often and this place used to suit his needs, but he's starting to notice how small it actually is. Maybe he was being too hard on Sonic. The guy is used to wide open spaces and room to move around in. Shadow has been used to tight spaces living on the ARK. Now, with another living being inhabiting this apartment maybe it isn't fulfilling his requirements for a comfortable living environment. He feels guilty for not noticing it sooner.

When he walks out into the living room, he's watching Sonic reading a storybook from his phone to the child. Shadow smiles when he hears Sonic making the goofy voices for the characters and showing Silver the pictures. The child watches it with wide eyes and laughs at Sonic's voice when it changes in pitch. Shadow decides to stay put and leans against the doorframe as he observes them.

He has no idea why, but there's this seed of pride starting to grow in his chest.

Silver starts nodding off not too long later and Sonic carries him into the bedroom. He tucks the kid in and notices how the energy swirling through the ring inhibitors acts like a nightlight of its own. Sonic thinks that's the coolest thing. He tiptoes out of the room and slowly closes the door.

He spots Shadow in the living room and he marches up to him, "The baby is successfully put to bed, agent Shadow. What are your next orders?"

Shadow gives him a thoughtful noise as he watches the blue hero stand before him. He gives Sonic a smirk and asks, "Since when do you listen to orders?"

"I'd argue with you, but you kinda have a point," Sonic snickers.

"You know, for someone who doesn't have childcare as part of their expertise, you handle it fairly well," Shadow remarks as he folds his arms across his chest.

"I'm just kinda winging it," Sonic admits as he lifts his arms behind his head and walks toward the couch.

Shadow stalks up to the blue hero and wraps his arms around him from behind. One hand resting on the hero's chest and the other around his waist. "Still, I'm impressed," Shadow whispers against his shoulder before nuzzling into his neck.

"Wow," Sonic's face burns bright red as he laughs, "Someone's touchy-feely tonight."

"I can't help it," Shadow murmurs against his neck, "There's something stirring inside me."

Sonic takes in a deep breath and bites his lip. He thinks he knows what it is, but he doesn't want to voice it. Not yet. It's too soon and too real. Instead, he just leans against Shadow and reaches his arm behind him, resting against the back of Shadow's head.

Shadow hums as Sonic's hand guides him closer to his neck and he licks and kisses against the indicated spot. He feels Sonic shudder against him and he pulls him in tighter. Sonic follows his steps forward until he gently presses him against the sofa.

Sonic feels the couch cushions against his back as he looks up at Shadow. He slowly opens his legs and presents himself to Shadow as he whispers, "Be gentle with me. I'm still a little sore."

Shadow nods and places a comforting hand on Sonic's cheek, "I will." He leans down and trails soft kisses from Sonic's lips down his torso. He lightly kisses each healing bruise along the way. Shadow trails down lower, planting kisses against the insides of his strained thighs as he feels them quake around him.

"What're you doing?" Sonic whispers down to him.

"Being gentle," Shadow responds, his hot breath tickling against Sonic's thigh.

Sonic doesn't understand at first, but when he feels Shadow's warm mouth around him he buries half his face into the cushion and croons out. His hand shoots out and grips the top of Shadow's head, guiding him in the steady rhythm. His breath hitches as he feels Shadow's hot tongue twisting and sliding around him in eager motions.

Shadow's eyes are intense as he looks up at Sonic, drinking in his reactions and he moans in response.

Sonic bites down on his lip hard as he feels the low rumble of Shadow's moan. It sends shivers up his spine and every nerve electrifies to life. He squirms around and feels his breaths getting heavier. Although, when he's moving around too much, he feels Shadow's firm grip holding him in place. He licks his lips and looks down at Shadow with a grateful look.

Shadow just sinks down in response and makes eye contact with him, pupils blown with lust. One of his hands slides up Sonic's chest to his cheek and angles his face down. Shadow's eyes are striking and certain, trying to relay a message with his gaze alone.

Sonic feels the arousal pooling in his gut when he sees it. He locks eyes with Shadow and reaches out to grab his hand. Their fingers twine together and Sonic arches his back, feeling the waves of pleasure pulsating through his body. "Sh-Shadow..." Sonic whispers, attempting a warning, but comes undone a moment later.

Shadow sinks down and closes his eyes, taking in his sweet release. He moans as his taste buds ignite and he savors the moment.

Sonic is just left staring at the ceiling in awe as his nerves buzz. He blinks his vision back into focus and pulls himself up as the emotions slowly lull into contentment. He reaches his hands out for Shadow and sighs happily when he feels his warm body nuzzled up next to him. He pulls Shadow close to his chest and smiles when Shadow presses his forehead against his heart.

He doesn't have to say it because Sonic already knows, but Shadow whispers regardless, "I love you so much."

"I love you too."

# Fuel to the Fire

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



## Chapter Five: Fuel to the Fire

Sonic finds himself opening his eyes when he feels Shadow shifting awake. He can hear Silver crying in the other room and he moves enough to let Shadow get up since he's more awake than he is. He rolls over onto his back when he hears Shadow pad across the living room and into the bedroom.

The cries turn into small whines and then stop. Sonic sighs in relief when the noise stops and rolls over, getting comfortable again. His eyes open though when he hears Shadow walking back in and he can feel the other's eyes on him. Sonic rolls back over and asks groggily, "What's up?"

Shadow looks away a bit embarrassed before asking, "I may need your assistance."

Sonic raises an eyebrow at him before looking down at Silver. He puts two and two together and nods, "Yeah. Okay." He pulls himself up and smacks his face a few times to wake himself up fully. He blindly reaches for his phone and pulls up that tutorial he had found yesterday from his history.

Shadow already has the backpack in one hand and the baby in the other. He only sits down on the ground when he sees Sonic do so. He pulls out the baby blanket and spreads it across the floor before resting Silver down gently.

Sonic shows Shadow the entire video first and Shadow watches it as intensely as he would a

surveillance video from the military. Sonic tries not to laugh as he points out each step. Shadow nods when he understands fully.

The blue hero rests the phone where it's still in view and directs Shadow as each step plays in front of them. When they're finished, Silver is kicking his legs happily and babbling what Sonic can only assume is his thanks.

"You picked that up faster than me," Sonic compliments with a laugh.

"I had a good teacher," is all Shadow says as he discards the diaper in the waste bin before washing his hands.

Sonic plays it off like he's not blushing, but he totally is. He shuffles through the bag and stops when he realizes something. He pulls out one of the flowers and frowns when he sees that it's limp and wilted. They never got to press them yesterday. He was too focused on Silver.

Shadow glances over at him and exchanges a sad look, "I'm sorry."

Sonic sighs and shakes his head, "It's okay. Silver comes first, right?"

Shadow goes to open his mouth, but stops when he sees the phone vibrating in Sonic's hand.

Sonic gives it a dirty look before holding it up to his ear and answering it in his usual cheery tone, "Sup, lil bro?" Sonic nods a few times and his smile slowly melts into a look of dread. He's silent though as if he's waiting for Tails to finish explaining before he forces his grin back on his face, "Alright. Will do. Gimme a hot minute though. I'll see you there." As Sonic hangs up though, he looks visibly upset.

"Sonic," Shadow goes to say, but stops when he sees Sonic's disappointed look staring back at him.

"This is the worst vacation ever," Sonic states before stomping out of the bathroom.

Shadow goes to follow him, but Sonic is pulling on his jacket and pocketing his phone.

"I dunno how long this is gunna take," Sonic starts to tell him.

Shadow shakes his head and makes his way over to Sonic. He clasps the zipper together and guides it up against Sonic's chest and leans in to kiss him, "I'll stay with Silver."

Sonic nods back to him and pulls Shadow into a tight hug, "I appreciate it." For a second, it seems like Sonic isn't going to pull away, but he finally does a moment later and heads out the door. He doesn't say good-bye, just waves Shadow off.

Sonic takes his sweet time getting to base. Yeah, he's the fastest thing alive, but he doesn't want to deal with this sooner than he needs to.

He does eventually show up and he's greeted by Amy, Tails, and surprisingly Knuckles as well. Whatever this news is, now he really doesn't want to know. He greets everyone like he would usually and Amy guides him into the back room.

The cat girl who was washed up on shore is sitting on the cot with a pensive look. When she sees Sonic walk in though, she gets to her feet immediately.

Sonic just waves at her with a grin, "Hey. How are ya? I heard you had a rough time on the beach."

"Where is it?" She demands instantly.

Sonic holds his hand up defensively, “Easy. Silver’s at home. He’s uh... with Shadow. He’s in good hands. Don’t worry.”

“Silver?” She asks like she doesn’t understand, “You named the bioweapon?”

Sonic exchanges a look with Amy. “Think I can have a second alone with her? She’s kinda disoriented,” Sonic tells her.

Amy just nods and heads out the door, shutting it as she goes.

Sonic snags the chair that’s on the far side of the room and sits down on it backwards, “So, uh... You came from the future? Wanna start from the beginning?” Sonic sits up straighter and presents his hand for her to shake, “I know. How about we get better introduced. I’m Sonic the Hedgehog.”

She looks down at his hand and then back up at him before taking it, “Blaze. I am Princess Blaze of the Flames.”

Sonic whistles, “A royal. Cool.”

Blaze squints her eyes at Sonic as she looks him over once more, “Are you sure you are Sonic?”

“I’m pretty sure,” Sonic snickers, “Never met another blue hedgehog that could run at the speed of sound.”

“My apologies, Your Majesty. You just act much different than I’m used to,” Blaze says slowly.

“Ha. No sweat,” Sonic replies with a laugh, but then his face drops when he realizes what she just said, “Wait. Your Majesty? Maybe you *do* have the wrong guy.”

“Unless another has your face, then... No,” Blaze states. She takes his hand and gets down on one knee, “It is nice to see you again. I’m so sorry I had failed you, my king, but I’ve come back in time in order to set things right.”

Sonic swallows thickly and pulls his hand away from hers, “Whoa! Hold up! I have no idea what’s going on. Like, if you’re from the future then we haven’t even met yet. I don’t know what’s going on.”

“How far back in time have I traveled?” She asks a bit unnerved.

“It’s 2011. If that helps,” Sonic informs her.

“The Time Stones,” she whispers lowly, “They took me 200 years into the past.”

“200 years!?” Sonic shouts.

“Perhaps this is a blessing in disguise,” she says thoughtfully, “We can begin preparations immediately.”

“What?” Sonic asks utterly confused, “What are you preparing for?”

“The end of the world,” Blaze states.

Sonic is taken aback. He doesn’t even realize he’s standing up from his chair either. He just watches her with confusion. There are a ton of questions going through his mind, but he settles with, “Who?”

“A rampaging monster called Iblis,” Blaze begins to explain, “It’s fire has consumed the world

entirely. We've been trying to keep the flames at bay, but it was too much. I was held accountable for the bioweapon you now call Silver. I was to wait for it to grow and train it to fight off the beast, but..."

"And I'm in your future," Sonic asks.

"You *were*. But you are no longer. The Legendary Hero... The Master of Chaos... You were successfully keeping the monster at bay, but... Then, a black creature who called himself Mephiles the Dark struck you in the chest and stole the soul of Chaos from you. After that, the fire became all consuming: immortal and untamed. Raw power unleashed onto the world," Blaze explains with deep regret, "That's why I need the bioweapon with you. He is the key to destroying both Iblis and Mephiles. It will smite out Mephiles' darkness and extinguish Iblis' flames."

Sonic thinks he understands even though he doesn't like it, "What started all of this?"

Blaze shakes her head, "I know not. I was born into the burning wasteland. Only you lived long enough to know, yet you never said. I cannot question a king. Especially not one as kind as you."

"Where's Shadow?" Sonic asks, feeling his heart racing in his chest.

"I beg your pardon, but I know not of anyone who goes by that name," Blaze tells him sadly.

Sonic takes a step back and feels lost. The image of Shadow falling from space goes through his head and he doesn't want to bear the thought of losing Shadow in the future.

Sonic takes a breather though. This girl doesn't seem to know too much. So, it's possible Shadow was somewhere and just never mentioned it.

Although, Sonic is *dead* in the future. So, the possibilities are all up in the air at this point.

"I apologize. This must be a lot to take in," Blaze says, sensing Sonic's anxieties.

"Yeah, a little," Sonic tries to joke. He taps his finger to his chin as he looks over Blaze once more. She's very stern and stoic. It reminds him of Shadow a little. "So... What is our... relationship in the future? Ya know, since you're princess and I'm king or whatever," Sonic asks.

"There's no relation really. We fight for the same cause. I was chosen by the flames. We are the only two that can control the fires Iblis starts," she informs.

"Chosen by the flames? What does that mean?" Sonic questions looking like he doesn't follow.

"When I was a young girl, my village was consumed by the flames. I reemerged unharmed," Blaze states calmly.

"Like a phoenix?" Sonic asks more than says.

"Precisely," she nods in confirmation, "After that, I was able to control the flames. You bore witness to it and we made a pact to work together."

"And I was alone," Sonic presses, hoping that it's false.

She nods much to Sonic's dismay, "You spoke of no one else and I did not pry."

"Kinda wish you did," Sonic says with a laugh.

"I apologize, my king," she says sadly, bowing her head.



“Easy there,” Sonic holds his hands out to her, “I’m not a king yet. So, like... Enough with the formalities.”

“As you wish,” she bows her head once more.

Sonic cringes a little, but doesn’t call her out on it. “I don’t know how comfortable I feel with a baby being a weapon,” Sonic says with a grim tone, “Did I have anything to do with that?”

“Yes and no,” she continues with an unsure look, “We went in search for the genetic blueprints of something called... The Ultimate Life Form. It was located in an abandoned base in the Mystic Ruins. We had reason to believe Mephiles was created fifteen years prior and that there was something there to combat him. Although when we found it, it was in stasis and still a child. Whereas Mephiles had fifteen years to evolve and develop, this bioweapon did not.”

“Who created these weapons?” Sonic asks even though he has a hunch.

“A scientist that went by the name Doctor Ivory,” she confirms.

Sonic lowers his brow and looks away, “That has to be Eggman.”

Blaze gives him a confused look, “Who?”

“No one,” Sonic shakes his head, “Can you take me there? I need to know if the Ultimate Life Form is still alive.”

Blaze deflates a little and gives him a frown, “It’s gone. Everything is gone. The only thing that was left was what you now call Silver. Even before the flames consumed the planet.”

“So there’s... nothing,” Sonic whispers.

Blaze shakes her head.

His hopes of Shadow being alive somehow went up in smoke. Literally. He doesn’t even want to fathom the thought of Eggman taking Shadow’s DNA and experimenting on it in order to create genetically mutated creatures. Disgusting.

And Iblis being rampant in the future... He can only guess who’s fault that was. Another one of Eggman’s schemes, but this time he succeeded. Without Sonic to clean up the mess, everything went to hell.

How is he supposed to explain this to Shadow? He can tell Shadow is already attached to Silver and is adamant about not wanting him to follow in his footsteps. It would break his heart to know Silver was a biological weapon designed to fight and kill.

This peace they were living in was only temporary. Sonic had just gotten used to it and he feels awful for jinxing it just for the selfish reason of wanting to revel in the heroic spotlight again.

Most importantly, how was he supposed to fix the future when his future-self couldn’t even do it?

“Will you take me to Silver?” Blaze asks as Sonic mulls over his thoughts.

“Yeah. Sure,” Sonic shrugs. He guides her out the door and down the corridors. He’s about to leave out the exit when he hears Knuckles.

“So, what is all this stuff about the future?” Knuckles demands.

"I'm getting it straightened out. Keep your boxing gloves on," Sonic states dismissively.

"No way," Knuckles shakes his head, "I need to know now. Ever since future girl over there came here, the Master Emerald has been going crazy. It's omitting bursts of chaos energy."

"That's weird," Sonic says slowly.

"I think you need to return the last Chaos Emerald to the altar on Angel Island," Knuckles informs him.

Sonic shakes his head, "No way, Knux. It's dangerous to keep all the Chaos Emeralds in one place. I know you live on a floating island and all that, but it has an easier chance of getting stolen."

"I understand," Knuckles seethes, "but something like this hasn't happened since..."

Sonic exchanges a look with Knuckles. They both know and somehow Knuckles seems to be acting like he knows more than he's let on. The hero sighs and motions his head for Knuckles to follow him, "C'mon. We'll talk on our way."

Knuckles nods and follows him out of the base. They begin their walk down the street and out of earshot when Knuckles says quietly, "I know about the Chaos thing, Sonic."

Sonic stiffens a little before slowly turning to him, "Wh-what do you mean?"

"I can sense things," Knuckles continues, "Ever since I met you, I could just tell. The murals in the sky temple have you all over them. You're linked with Chaos. When you fought Chaos the first time, I could sense your minds connecting as one. I can sense his spirit inside of you currently."

Sonic knits his brow together and asks, "And you didn't tell anyone?"

"I don't ask questions," Knuckles tells him, "I know better than that."

Sonic nods and appreciates it. That's one thing about Knuckles he is grateful for. He doesn't push the unknown and doesn't pry for answers that shouldn't be answered. All he ever cares about is protecting the Master Emerald.

When he leads them into the apartment building, Blaze is looking around at her surroundings like she's in a foreign place. Which makes sense because she is.

Sonic walks in the front door and looks around. He doesn't see Shadow in eyesight so he cries out for him, "Shadow?"

His voice comes from the bathroom, "In here."

"We have company," Sonic says in a sing-song voice.

"Goodie," Shadow's voice is dripping with sarcasm, "I... have a situation if you're free to assist."

Sonic turns to Knuckles and Blaze, "I'll be right back. Make yourselves comfortable."

The two just kind of look at each other. They're both out of their element. Neither have ever probably been in an apartment. Blaze for obvious reasons and Knuckles because he sleeps on a floating rock. They just kind of stand where they are, glancing around here and there. Otherwise, they look like statues.

Sonic makes his way into the bathroom and sees Shadow up to the elbows in bath bubbles as he's

rubbing caked on baby food off Silver's fur. Silver is flailing his arms about and splashing Shadow in the face. Shadow is unflinching, more focused on the task at hand.

"Yikes. What happened?" Sonic is almost afraid to ask.

Shadow turns to Sonic with an exasperated look, "Apparently Silver did not appreciate my interpretation of a fighter jet."

Sonic tries not to laugh because Shadow looks like he's 100% done with this, but he can't decide what's funnier. The thought of Shadow attempting to make airplane noises or the fact that Silver had a temper tantrum in response. He gets himself under control though and helps Shadow clean the messy hedgehog.

When he's free of baby food debris Shadow goes to towel him off, but Sonic stops him.

"Watch this," Sonic says smugly. He folds himself around the small hedgehog and spin dries him. Water droplets spray everywhere, but once Sonic stands up tall with the baby in his hands Silver is sparkling clean.

"So, *that's* why the walls are starting to warp in here," Shadow remarks in a stale tone.

Sonic takes a step back guiltily, "I'll pay for the security deposit."

Shadow lifts his hand up to stop him. It's silent way of telling him to forget about it. "Soon, we won't have to worry about that," Shadow states as he dries off his arms with a hand towel.

"I'm sure that means something big, but... I kinda have news," Sonic says nervously.

Shadow sighs and just nods. When Sonic specifies *news* alone, it's usually a cue for something bad. "Take Silver. I'll finish up in here and be right out," Shadow tells him.

Sonic nods and tosses Silver up and catches him a few times as he says, "Were you being mean to Shadow?"

Silver laughs gleefully each time Sonic catches him.

Sonic holds the baby in his arms as he walks back out into the living room. When he sees the two haven't moved from the front door, he rolls his eyes. He motions to the couch, "Do you guys not know what comfortable means?"

Blaze bows to him properly, "I apologize." She makes her way over to the couch and sits stiffly.

Knuckles kind of eyes her and wonders if he should bow too, but realizes this is Sonic. He's not going to bow to his friend. He marches over to the couch and sits on the far side of it.

Blaze holds her arms out, "May I?"

Sonic nods and hands her the baby.

Blaze doesn't hold him like a baby though. She glances him over and inspects him carefully. She runs her fingers along the gold devices around it's wrists and ankles. "Good. They weren't damaged on our journey," Blaze says out loud.

"Are those ring inhibitors?" Sonic asks carefully.

Blaze stops and slowly looks up at him, "How do you know something like that? I wasn't aware

they even existed until I found Silver.”

“Shadow has something similar,” Sonic states.

Blaze just looks confused.

Shadow makes his way out of the bathroom. He sends a casual wave at Knuckles to which Knuckles nods back at him. He stops when he sees the cat girl and glances back at Sonic, “New friend?”

Blaze’s fur prickles on end and she shoves the child back into Sonic’s hands. She gets up and stands in front of Sonic protectively, “Mephiles! What are you doing in this time period!?”

Shadow just looks her over, but isn’t intimidated in the least. He folds his arms across his chest and replies, “I am Shadow. Shadow the Hedgehog.”

“I don’t care what you call yourself,” Blaze bellows out angrily, “You’re a *murderer!*”

Shadow hardens his stare and his frown deepens. He doesn’t say anything. Not because it’s false, but because he does have blood on his hands. No matter how much he wants to leave the past behind him that fact still remains.

Sonic tries to step forward, “Easy. Easy. This is Shadow. He’s my—“

Blaze pushes him behind her again roughly, “Do not engage, your Majesty. He’s dangerous.”

Shadow unfolds his arms now and clenches his fists tightly as he speaks, “Get out of my home.”

“Gladly,” Blaze spits back like venom as she charges at him. Flames erupt around her body and she tackles Shadow through the window.

Knuckles gets up suddenly and looks at the shattered window, “What the--?!”

“Hold Silver,” Sonic demands as he shoves the baby in the echidna’s hand before shooting out through the hole in the window.

Knuckles blinks in confusion as he looks over at the child sitting in his large hand.

Sonic lands with one knee on the asphalt and looks around frantically until he hears a crash.

Shadow grits his teeth, trying to ignore the pain radiating up his back from the impact of the building. He pulls himself out of the rubble and hovers with his shoes. He looks around, scanning the area. His eyes widen when he sees the figure lowering from the sky.

Blaze is hovering in front of him, flames licking around her feet, “How dare you trick these people. I know what you really are.”

Shadow’s face falters slightly, but hardens it as he braces himself, “The only one who’s tricked is you.”

“I’d never forget a face like yours,” Blaze seethes, “I’d never forget the face of the one who murdered Sonic the Hedgehog.”

Shadow’s eyes widen, “What?”

He doesn’t get another second to respond before Blaze is flipping through the air and sending a hard kick to the back of his head. Shadow freefalls toward the street and his hover shoes ignite to life,

catching himself.

“Shadow!” Sonic cries out as he runs toward him.

“Stay back,” Shadow warns him and pushes Sonic back. The moment he does, a heel is digging into his skull and sending his face straight into the pavement.

“Do not lay a hand on him,” she shouts with rage.

Shadow’s hand snaps up and grabs her by the ankle before even pulling his face out from the asphalt. Oh, and when he does finally lift his face up he’s seething with pure rage and hatred. He throws her with all of his might and turns to Sonic, “You want to be useful? Bring me my Chaos Emerald.”

Sonic gives him a dirty look, “First of all, *rude*. Second—“

“Now!” Shadow’s shout interrupts him.

Sonic knows not to argue further, but he’s not going to let this slide. He dashes back up the building and slips into one of the non-broken windows. He lands on the drawer and opens it, but when he looks inside the emerald is gone. He looks up and sees that Knuckles has it in his hand.

Right. The sensing chaos energy thing.

“Knuckles, I need that emerald,” Sonic says as he holds his hand out.

“But you said,” Knuckles starts to argue.

“I know what I said, but I need it right now and I’ll give it back after,” Sonic tries to reason.

“No way,” Knuckles grits his teeth, “What if using the Chaos Emeralds while the Master Emerald is in this state triggers something catastrophic to happen? I’m not taking that risk.”

“I...” Sonic goes to say, but winces when he hears a crash and a car alarm going off outside. “Knux, if you don’t give it to me...” Sonic starts to warn.

Knuckles gives him an unmoving look before holding up Silver by the back of the neck, “You’ll what?”

“Oh, that’s low, Knuckles. Even for you,” Sonic says with a frown, “I thought we were cool.”

“So did I,” Knuckles grumbles back before tossing Silver in the air and escaping out the window.

Sonic doesn’t hesitate to choose. He leaps in the air and catches Silver in his arms. He looks the child over and luckily Silver is giggling and cooing like he thinks it’s a game. Sonic sighs, but stiffens when he hears another crash. He needed to get back out there pronto.

“Shadow!?” Sonic calls out, trying to find him.

A car door is sent sailing through the air and Shadow emerges from a dented up vehicle. The ebony hero looks beyond angry at this point. “Where is it?” He asks with burning heat in his pupils.

“Knux-the-Butt took it and brought it back to his big dumb floating rock,” Sonic explains.

Shadow snarls, but before he can utter a word Blaze rushes in and kicks Shadow back into a building.

She turns to the blue hero and assures him, “Do not worry, your Majesty. I will not let any harm come to you.”

“Uh...” Before Sonic can even finish, she’s off again. He looks down at Silver and gives him a grin, “Ready to go turbo, little guy?”

Silver looks back at Sonic with big, wide, determined eyes.

“Thought so,” Sonic replies with a wink. Sonic races forward and completely bypasses Blaze. He zooms in and grabs Shadow from the building before the girl gets there.

Her fist cuts through the bricks and gets stuck for a moment.

Sonic helps Shadow back on his feet and lets the dark hero lean against him. “She’s strong,” Shadow grits out like he hates admitting it. Although, Sonic is kind of worried about that revelation. Shadow admitting anyone is strong is a pretty terrifying thought. “You need to stay back,” Shadow warns him.

“I’m pretty sure I’m the outlier in this situation,” Sonic responds.

“Stop using big words if you don’t know the meaning to them,” Shadow states with disgust.

“Hey! I’m just trying to broaden my vocabulary. Between you and Tails I feel dumb as ever,” Sonic retorts.

“Then, might I suggest a dictionary,” Shadow says before getting back onto his own footing, “Besides, when I’m done with Knuckles he won’t have any functioning brain cells and you won’t have fret about your IQ any longer.” Shadow twists his inhibitors off one-by-one and hands them over to Sonic, “I’m done playing games. I’m finishing this now.”

Sonic hasn’t held Shadow’s inhibitors in awhile and he wishes he never had to again, but he nods to him anyway, “Good luck.”

Shadow nods back and begins to walk over to the cat girl. The bright aura around him bursts forth in a blinding light. He watches her forcefully remove her hand from the wall and get back into a fighting stance. “This is your final warning,” Shadow seethes.

“Go to hell,” she snarls back.

Shadow isn’t happy with that answer. He lunges forward and she dodges, flipping over him with acute flexibility. He turns back to her, but stops when he feels an intense pull. He looks up and sees Blaze holding her hands out as his energy is getting sucked into her body. Shadow’s breath hitches feeling his energy draining quicker than he’s ever felt before.

“I’ve dealt with a fire god stronger than you’d ever hope to be,” Blaze shouts over to him as she feels his chaos energy flowing through her body.

Shadow falls on one knee, but refuses to budge. He gasps when he feels the asphalt crack around his feet. He can barely breath the force is so strong. He feels like a star about to collapse in on itself.

There’s a blur of blue before the wind around them picks up. Sonic’s legs go into overdrive and a swirling blue tornado surrounds them and it’s enough to knock Blaze off her feet. Sonic skids to a halt in front of Shadow and he kneels down in front of him, “You okay?”

“My... M-my,” Shadow tries to speak, but his body keeps shaking. Instead, his hand reaches for his

inhibitors.

Sonic nods like he understands and slips them around his wrists, clicking them back in place.

Shadow finally catches his breath and whispers, “Thank you.”

Sonic nods back to him, but he’s disturbed by what just happened. Shadow is nearly invincible without his inhibitors. His energy drains faster, but he’s never seen it drain that fast before.

“Step aside, your Majesty,” Blaze announces as she gets her bearings, “Let me finish off that foul beast!”

Shadow grits his teeth and tries to get back on his feet, but falls forward into Sonic’s chest. Sonic catches him instantly and holds him close. He’s never seen Shadow this weak. At least, not since...

Sonic turns around and sees Blaze’s shadow hovering over them. She holds out her hands again and Sonic thrusts himself between her and Shadow. He holds Silver up over his head and shouts, “Don’t come any closer, Blaze! Or I’ll kill the bioweapon!”

Blaze lowers her hands and carefully backs away. She gets down on one knee and bows before him, “Yes, my king.”

Sonic finally breathes a sigh of relief. He feels Shadow shifting next to him and just as he’s about to turn to him, Shadow grabs Silver from his arms and kicks him in the gut. Sonic skids to the ground and gasps as his diaphragm spasms. He sees Blaze about to get back up and he rasps out, “Don’t move.”

She looks reluctant, but stays where she is regardless.

“What the heck, Shadow,” Sonic grumbles as he looks back up at the ebony hero.

Shadow is holding Silver against his chest in a protective manner as he gives Sonic a look of betrayal, “Is that all we are to you? Biological weapons?”

Sonic tries to will his lungs to work as he speaks, “Hold on. That’s not—“

Shadow gives Sonic a mournful look and can’t bring himself to look eyes with him any longer. “All you care about is yourself,” Shadow seethes with cool anger as he slips the engagement ring off his finger before flicking it to the ground next to the blue hero, “Get out of my life.” Shadow doesn’t bother with him and doesn’t want to hear him utter another word. He’s heard enough. He does his best to take proud steps as he walks away, but falters a bit before continuing his trek.

“W-wait! Shadow!” Sonic manages to cry out through the pain shooting through his lungs. He just rolls over and tries not to picture Shadow’s face. He’s still in disbelief about what just happened. He looks over at the ring next to him and lifts his hand up to clutch it to his chest.

“Sir, are you alright?” Blaze asks as she holds her hand out to him.

Sonic sees it and smacks it away before getting up on his own. He watches Shadow turn the corner and out of his eyesight. He could catch up to him, but he doesn’t know if it will even matter.

He should have been there for him more. He shouldn’t have hesitated. He should have accepted Silver right away. He should have...

“He’s getting away with the bioweapon,” Blaze tries to explain, “I can still...”

“Don’t,” Sonic shakes his head and heads the opposite way, “Don’t pursue him.”

“What?” She looks utterly confused.

“That isn’t Mephiles, Blaze. That’s the Ultimate Life Form. That’s Shadow,” Sonic tells her softly. He adds quietly for only himself to hear, “Is this why I was alone in the future?”

Blaze’s eyes light up when Sonic’s words register, “So, Mephiles was made from...?”

“Does it even matter anymore?” Sonic asks.

“Pardon?” She responds with a brow raised.

“The world is gunna end. Who cares what happens?” Sonic grits out as he keeps walking.

“I care!” Blaze shouts back.

Sonic rolls his eyes, “Fine. Then, talk to Amy. She apparently has super special future vision or something. Leave me alone.”

She nods to him and bows, “As you wish.”

Sonic growls because he was joking, but whatever. He didn’t really want her tagging along anyway.

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Sonic invites himself into Tails’ workshop and waits for him to come home. He sits at the counter and spins the ring around on the countertop, watching it twirl down until it’s on its side again. He does it over and over and over again and thinks about all the things he could have done better. He thinks about all the things he could have done and said that would have changed fate. Or if it would even matter. He thinks about how Shadow was probably right. They were doomed from the start. Their relationship was never meant to work. They were too different.

Sonic hears the front door open and his stomach drops. This is what he wanted and this is what he’s been waiting for, but at the same time he’s dreading it because he’s going to have to say everything out loud.

“Sonic,” Tails says with surprise in his voice, “It’s nice to see you, but...” He glances down at the object Sonic is twirling and frowns when he sees that it’s a ring similar to the one still on his finger. “Sonic?” Tails asks again.

“I messed up royally, buddy,” Sonic mumbles quietly.

Tails walks over to him and places a hand on his back, “Talk to me.”

Sonic doesn’t know if he can. It suddenly feels like his throat has closed up. The small touch on his back has his insides coiling and his heart crumbling apart. So instead of explaining himself, he just turns to Tails and buries his face into his chest and holds onto him tightly. His shoulders bob with each silent sob as he just completely loses it.

And all he can think about while Tails is hugging him and rubbing his back is how he’s even a failure at being the older brother.

Tails lets him stay and Sonic spends the night sulking in his room. Trying to figure out what he could possibly say to make it better. He almost wishes that Blaze hadn’t come here. At least he’d be able to enjoy the moments he could before the world went under.



He has the engagement ring in one hand and Shadow's old inhibitor in the other as he stares deeply at the picture in the picture frame on his nightstand. He had pieced it back together again after their last battle with Eggman. Shadow had his memories removed and when he tried to show him the photo of them he ripped it up and threw it back into his face. Back then, it hurt; but now, Sonic can't help but think that he deserved it.

Maybe he really was just toying with Shadow. He wasn't taking their relationship seriously. Not as seriously as he should have. Yeah, he proposed, but when Silver came into the picture it was clear he wasn't standing with Shadow.

There's so many things he wished he'd done differently. He just can't believe how quickly it was all taken away from him.

When he gets up around noon the next morning, he unloads everything onto Tails. Tails is definitely surprised, but he's also sympathetic. Sonic feels awful though. Tails would be on his side no matter what. He feels like he doesn't deserve it.

"So, what are you going to do?" Tails asks.

"I don't know, bud. He wants nothing to do with me. So, is there really anything I can do?" Sonic responds with his head held low.

"You could try to talk to him," Tails explains, "I'd give it a few days, but I think you should tell him the whole situation with Blaze and how you were just trying to protect him."

Sonic lets out a pathetic laugh and rests his hand to his cheek, "By putting Silver in danger?"

Tails doesn't say anything, just frowns at him.

"We coulda been a family," Sonic whispers, "but my insecurities got in the way of everything."

"Do you really think...?" Tails starts to ask.

"I could tell, Tails. The way Shadow held him and handled him. The way he looked at Silver. Shadow knew he wanted to be a dad before he could even put words to the meaning. I was just too scared and stubborn to talk to him about it," Sonic tells him softly, "Shadow is always willing to sacrifice everything for someone else."

"So are you, Sonic," Tails reminds him.

Sonic shakes his head, "No, I'm willing to sacrifice everything for myself. For my own glory. For the recognition. For a spotlight. I feel like fame has warped my sense of morality. He told me to take that part of me and throw it away and be my own person, but I can't let it go."

"It's hard to live in the spotlight, Sonic, but I don't believe for one second that everything you've ever done for everyone is just for fame and recognition," Tails responds seriously, "When you first met me and you saw I was being bullied, you didn't help me because you wanted recognition. We were just a couple of kids who lived on an island. You didn't help me because you thought you'd get anything out of it. You did it because you have a good heart."

"I'm a different person than I was back then," Sonic points out sadly, "Now, I'm just insecure and I care too much about what everyone thinks. And if I pretend like it doesn't bother me, then I don't have to deal with it."

"You aren't perfect," Tails says as he pats him on the back, "Sometimes people can't wrap their

minds around that concept, but it's true. It's okay not to be perfect as long as you're doing the best you can."

"Thanks," Sonic says with a slight smile, "I guess."

"Don't thank me," Tails smiles back, "Thank the hero who taught me that."

Sonic has to look away because he can feel the tears pricking at the sides of his eyes. He takes in a deep breath before turning back to him with a smile and a thumbs up.

"There's my big bro," Tails says with a laugh as he pulls Sonic into a noogie.

Sonic tries and fails to get out of Tails' grip, but if he's honest with himself he wasn't really trying too hard to begin with.

## Chapter End Notes

These chapters might take more time to come out than others. There's a lot of content that needs to be edited.

So, thank you in advance for being patient.

# The Chase



## Chapter Six: The Chase

Two weeks go by when there's a knock on Shadow's door and he peers through the peep hole. He sighs in relief when he sees that it's just Amy. He opens the door for her, but doesn't expect the extra company. Cream, her chao, her mother Vanilla, and Rouge make their way inside as well.

"I wasn't expecting so much company. I only requested Amy's aid," Shadow states.

"Nonsense," Amy says with an upbeat attitude, "You said you needed help moving. You'll need more than one person."

"I wouldn't need anyone if I had my Chaos Emerald still," Shadow says with anger.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm working on that," Rouge replies as she waves her hand dismissively, "Also, Omega is here. He just had some trouble fitting through the lobby."

"So, where did Sonic run off to? That slacker," Amy asks with her hands on her hips.

Shadow is quiet for a long while. He quells the emotions he's been swallowing down and walks toward the living room. "Another reason why I requested your assistance, Miss Rose," Shadow says as he slides a box over to her, resting the guitar atop it.

Amy blinks in confusion, "Are these Sonic's things?"

"Could you... bring them to him?" Shadow asks, visibly uncomfortable.

Amy gasps loudly and reaches to grab Shadow's hand. She looks it over and then flips it palm up as if it's some kind of magic trick, "Where's—"

Shadow pulls his hand away and just glares at the ground, "I'm through with that chapter of my life." He slides the box a bit more forcefully with his foot and turns away, ignoring the guitar sliding off it and making a loud '*clang!*'

"Are... Are you sure you want to move still?" Amy asks hesitantly.

"I put the down payment on the house already," Shadow grumbles with anger, "Besides, I can't fathom the thought of living here any longer when everything reminds me..." Shadow trails off and shakes his head, "It's for Silver now. I'm going to protect him at all costs. Anyone who makes an enemy of him is my enemy as well. No exceptions."

Amy's mouth hangs open like she can't believe it, but it turns into fiery rage, "Are you kidding me!? *Oh!* That boy!" She pulls out her hammer and goes to march out the door, "When I get my hands on him...!"

"Easy, Miss Amy," Cream says as she stops her in her tracks. She tries to calm the fiery pink hedgehog down.

Rouge makes her way over to Shadow and gives him a look of concern, "This is so unlike Sonic. It's also so unlike you."

Shadow places his hand onto his face and feels the emotions overflowing inside him. He turns sharply and walks toward the bedroom. He slams the door before Rouge can walk in with him.

"Shadow..." Rouge says quietly through the door as she goes to jiggle the handle.

"Don't!" Shadow shouts.

Rouge pulls her hand away as if it were on fire. She settles with sitting down against it instead. She can hear him though. Practically next to her, but the slab of wood between them. She can hear his unsteady breaths. It hurts a little to hear.

"This is agony," Shadow whispers to her.

She lets out a sigh and places a hand on the door, "What is, hon?"

"Love," Shadow grits out, "Why do people do this to themselves?"

Rouge replies like she knows firsthand, "It's better than being alone." She flinches when she hears the bang on the door and just frowns because she knows his fist collided with it.

"I want to rip him apart," Shadow seethes heatedly, "I want to look inside. I want to know what else he's been hiding behind that stupid smile. I just want to know. I want to know what he *really* thinks of me."

"It's normal to feel angry in this situation," Rouge tells him reassuringly.

"Angry," Shadow laughs lowly like it's a joke. He sighs and presses his head against the door and murmurs, "He makes me feel like I'm both the strongest and weakest being alive. I'm merely a pawn. Bending to his will." His voice returns to being tense, "I hate how much I like it."

Rouge's frown deepens and she waits for him to continue.

"I can't see him again," Shadow says unevenly, "He'll just flash that smile and I'll be enraptured. It's a curse."

"I know you, Shadow," Rouge comments with a laugh, "You bend to no one. You'll get through this. Don't forget that you always have Omega and I. We'll kick his ass if you can't."

There's a small click and Rouge notices that the door is cracked open. She gets back to her feet and carefully peeks inside, "Shadow?"

The room is dark, but she can still make out the outline of Shadow's form on the bed. There's a soft teal glow coming from the crib. She squints her eyes and can make out the sad smile on her teammate's face as he's looking down at it.

Rouge closes the door behind her and makes her way over to his side, not yet sitting down. She glances down at the crib and sees the child inside. "This is why you haven't been at work," she comments.

Shadow nods slowly, "Apparently he came from the future with a someone called Blaze. She... has these powers and..." Shadow rubs his wrists and glances back at Rouge, "When I took my inhibitors off she was able to absorb my chaos energy."

"What?" Rouge asks with terror in her voice.

Shadow lowers his brow and gives her a serious look, "I don't know who she is or which side Sonic stands in all of this, but anyone who calls this child a bioweapon is no one I want to associate with."

"Are you sure blue said that?" Rouge asks with disbelief.

"Yes. I know it's true, but..." Shadow starts to say.

"No, it's not!" Rouge shouts with anger, "He's a defenseless child! And you aren't a weapon either. So, get those thought out of your head right now." She sits down next to him and grabs his shoulders, "Weapons don't have freewill and the ability to think. They don't have a heart and soul. You do and I'm sure that kid does too. You're living beings just like all of us. Just because you were designed to be a weapon of destruction doesn't mean you have to use your powers like that. You choose to use them for good."

Shadow sighs and knows she's right, but it's just hard to get those thoughts out of his head. "I don't know if I can raise this child alone," he admits softly, "At first, I was sure, but..."

"You won't be alone, Shadow," Rouge says with certainty.

"I'm afraid that if I don't step forward and raise him, he'll be alone and confused. Walking the path I had. Anger and destruction and pain," Shadow murmurs to her, "but I'm also afraid the same result will become him if I raise him as well."

"No, Shadow," Rouge shakes her head, "The fact that you care about this child's wellbeing that much will just ensure he's going to have a good life."

He nods back to her and gives her a look of appreciation, "I just wish..."

"You're the one doing the right thing, Shadow," Rouge states sternly.

"I hate it," Shadow replies quietly.

“Don’t,” Rouge shake her head, “It’s better this way.”

Shadow just nods.

“Now, Come on,” Rouge says with a playful smirk, “If you don’t show Omega your bundle of joy, he’ll feel left out.”

Shadow rolls his eyes and sighs, but there’s a faint smile on his face.

What Shadow doesn’t expect to happen is for everyone to stop what they’re doing and want to see Silver. They each take turns holding him and Shadow feels a little embarrassed by it. It’s a strange feeling though. In a way he feels a bit happy to have the support. Although, he still feels awkward about it since these are Sonic’s friends. He tries to block that out because that’s one thing he doesn’t want to think about right now.

They finally get outside and Rouge sits on Omega’s large shoulder as he tries comprehend what the small creature in Shadow’s arms is.

Luckily, Vanilla takes over and explains what babies are to him.

As she explains, Amy is looking displeased as ever. As she’s about to leave, Cream tries to stop her again, “Where are you going?”

“This isn’t right,” Amy states with anger, “I can’t just stand around knowing Sonic is at Tails’, kicking back and taking it easy. It goes against everything I stand for.”

“What do you mean?” Cream questions sadly.

She lowers her voice a little as she talks to Cream, “I need to give him a piece of my mind. No one deserves this. Love is the most precious thing to me. Knowing Sonic threw it all away just for selfish reasons isn’t going to sit with me.”

“Don’t hurt him,” Cream pleads, “too much at least, Miss Amy.”

“Not any more than I usually would,” Amy says with a pout, “I just want him to talk.”

“Okay...” Cream finally gives in, “Just be careful.”

“Will do,” Amy replies with a wink before heading off, “I’ll be right back!”

No one else seems to notice Amy’s absence. Everyone is more focused on Vanilla showing the large robot how to handle the baby properly.

The baby coos and giggles when it sees the large red eyes of the robot looking back at him. He grasps and plays with its large metal fingers.

“So, what do you think, big guy?” Rouge asks Omega as she pat his large yellow head.

“Desire to maim has greatly decreased,” Omega states, as his eyes continue to scan the child.

“Hear that, Shadow?” Rouge says jokingly, “We might have to get Omega a therapy pet to reduce his stress.”

Shadow just shakes his head and looks away to hide the fact that he’s smiling.

“Also, desire to protect has also increased,” Omega continues as his metallic brow lowers,

“Permission to destroy Sonic the Hedgehog?”

Shadow’s eyes widen, “N-no.”

“Threatening the small Shadow will not go unpunished,” Omega states as he shifts his posture, “A warrant for his arrest—“

“Stop,” Shadow glares up at him, “I...” He frowns, not knowing how to really respond to that.

Rouge sees this and sighs, “No destroying, Omega. Also, the baby’s name is Silver.”

Omega nods once and replies, “Silver. Adding that to my database. Filing under: ...uh...”

Rouge glances at the robot and asks, “What’s wrong?”

“What is a small Shadow? What does that make him?” Omega asks.

“Oh,” Rouge laughs into her hand and crosses her leg over the other, “That makes Shadow a dad.”

Shadow jerks his head up to stare up at Rouge, “That’s... not.”

“Silver. Filing under: Shadow’s son,” Omega finishes.

“I’m not,” Shadow tries to say, “I don’t...”

“What’s wrong, Shadow?” Rouge asks with a smirk.

“I’ve had bad experiences with... fathers,” Shadow mumbles awkwardly, “I don’t know how I feel about that title.”

Rouge floats down from Omega’s shoulder and places a hand on his shoulder, “I know, but look at it this way. This is a chance to bring a good meaning to the word. You’ve already redefined what the Black Arms and the Robotniks are. Do the same here.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Shadow murmurs.

Omega holds his hand out to Shadow so he can take the child from him, “Here. Hold Silver. Anxiety levels will decrease.”

“I’m not sure that’s how it works,” Shadow grumbles before he reaches up to take Silver. He holds the child in his arms again and stares down at him. Somehow though, the kid’s bright smiling face does make him a bit less tense.

“I don’t know, Mister Shadow,” Cream chimes in, “I think it worked.”

Shadow smiles down at her softly. He doesn’t agree, but he doesn’t deny it either.

“Also, I want you to take Chocola with you,” the rabbit girl says as she motions for the black and red chao to him, “He can help take care of Silver too.”

Shadow frowns down at her when he sees the chao floating next to him, “Are you sure?”

Cream nods happily, “He will help protect Silver. Besides, I should work more with Cheese. He gets sad when I don’t take him on missions.”

Shadow nods to her, “Thank you.”

Vanilla places a hand on her daughters shoulder and gives her a proud smile. Cream just smiles back and blushes as she folds her arms behind her back.

Shadow looks around a bit confused before asking, “Where did Amy go?”

“Uh...” Cream laughs nervously, “I wouldn’t worry about her. I’m sure she’ll be right back.”

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“Sonic the Hedgehog!!!”

Sonic’s eyes shoot open when he hears the familiar screech of his name. He shrivels in on himself and does his best to glue as much of his back to the roof of the workshop as possible. Maybe if she thought he wasn’t here she’d leave.

“Where is he!?” Amy’s voice demands from inside the workshop.

“W-wait a minute,” he hears Tails’ voice falter.

“I know he’s here,” Amy interrupts, “Tell me now or I’ll find him myself! And trust me, you don’t want me to do that!”

Sonic groans and knows better than to get his little bro involved in his messes. He pulls himself up and hops off the roof right in front of the door. “Hey, ice queen,” Sonic spits back as he holds his arms up like he’s displaying himself, “Right here.”

“Oh, you are *not* in a position to be throwing insults,” Amy bites back.

“Uh huh,” Sonic says as he folds his arms across his chest, “Because barging into people’s homes and threatening to wreck the place is totally cool.”

Amy stomps out of the workshop and gets into Sonic’s face, “You’d know about home wrecking since you did it to your own relationship.”

“Buzz off, Amy,” Sonic replies with disgust, “Shove your nose in someone else’s business.”

That’s the final straw for her. She swings her hammer down with rage as Sonic quickly dodges it. Although, it leaves a pretty decent dent in the concrete steps. She gasps when Sonic grabs the handle of it and swings her around once before letting go. She flips back and lands on her feet, skidding to the ground.

Sonic winces and waves his hand a bit. The thing was a lot heavier than he’d imagine it being. He’s used to seeing her swinging it around like it’s nothing that he didn’t expect it to be so solid. He places his hands on his hips and glares down at her, “No, seriously. *Buzz off*. You’re like the last person I wanna talk to right now.”

She gets up before Sonic can turn his back to her, “What did you *do* to him, Sonic!?”

“Work on your listening skills, Ames,” Sonic retorts with a snotty attitude.

Amy pulls her hammer over her shoulder and charges at the blue hero. She swings it and it goes straight through the plywood that’s holding up the roof structure over the door. It collapses on impact and Amy blinks when she doesn’t see Sonic.

Sonic had jumped over the blow last second and lands on top of the weapon. “This is getting old,” Sonic states with anger.



“Apologize to him,” Amy demands.

“Make me,” Sonic challenges with a snarl.

Amy grips the handle on her hammer tighter and reels upwards.

Sonic is taken off guard as he’s soaring into the air. He tries to find something to land on, but there’s nothing and he’s descending fast. He face plants on the ground and rolls over, spitting out blades of grass.

Amy stands above him and points her hammer in his direction, “Can you stop acting like a brat for once in your life and just take responsibility for your actions?”

That hits Sonic harder than any blows she’s dealt so far. He pulls himself back up to his feet. He goes to swing his foot out and trip her, but her weapon is already blocking him off. So, he dashes the opposite way and tries again, but it’s the same. He dodges her swings and is forced to jump backwards away from her range.

“Stop running away and fight me,” she spouts out.

“I don’t even wanna fight you,” Sonic responds, “There’s no point.”

“Why? Because you’re afraid you’ll lose to a *girl*?” Amy antagonizes.

“Oh, right. Like you could beat me,” Sonic says as he rolls his eyes.

“Fine. If I win, you have to go back and apologize to Shadow,” she bargains.

“And if I win?” Sonic asks with an impatient look.

“If you win you can stay here and continue to mope around like a sad sack,” Amy responds.

Sonic can feel the anger boiling in his chest now as his spines bristle. She has no idea what happened and has no idea what he’s going through. He folds in on himself and charges into a spin dash, “Prepare your *butt* because it’s gunna get *kicked*!”

Amy stands in a solid stance and holds her weapon up, waiting for the right shot. When she sees Sonic finally dash forward, she swings her hammer in an arch and hits Sonic back so hard it would make a professional baseball player jealous.

Sonic is taken off guard and tumbles backward, just staring at Amy in awe.

“Thank Shadow for that one,” Amy spits back, twisting her lips into a frown, “Although, he’s so much more coordinated than you.”

Sonic digs his fingers into the ground. Oh, now he really hates Shadow for training his friends. Especially Amy. He gets back onto his feet and grits out, “Yeah? Well, why don’t you date the guy? He’s single now.”

“You heartless jerk!” She cries out and charges forward. Just as she goes to lift her hammer, Sonic jumps on the mallet portion of it and sends her backwards.

Sonic grabs the hammer and tosses it across the field with shaky arms. He pins Amy down with his foot on her chest and stretches the kinks out of his arms. “Yeah, I know I am,” Sonic states with his brow lowered.

Amy just looks up at him in disbelief. Not because she lost, but because she can't believe Sonic is admitting it so freely. She pushes his legs away and gets back onto her feet. "So, that's just it? Is this you now? Hurting people for fun?" She asks with an expectant look.

Sonic just shakes his head and walks back toward the workshop, "I won. Now, leave me alone."

"But did you really?" Amy asks with her hands on her hips, "He's leaving, you know? He had a house all set up for you and Silver. He was going to start his life with you and you just threw it back in his face."

"Out of all the people who have known me over the years, I thought you'd at least get it. I'm an impulsive jerk. I can't handle something like that. And I don't deserve it either," Sonic says defeated.

"That doesn't sound like you at all," Amy points out like she's disappointed in him, "You were always resilient. You fought for what was right. Yeah, you were kind of a jerk to me, but I had my thorns too. Although, you have never, ever hurt me on purpose. I just needed more time to mature and understand your side of things."

There was that word again. Mature. He still doesn't fully know what it means.

"Swallow your pride, *please*," Amy practically begs, "Don't do this to yourself."

"Why do you even care? What do you get out of this?" Sonic questions with agitation.

"I get to see two of my good friends happy again," she replies without second thought.

Sonic stares at her like he's seeing her for the first time. She really didn't have any ulterior motives. She really was just looking out for her friends this whole time. It really was him who hadn't changed his opinion on her.

"Amy, can you do me a favor?" Sonic asks as he walks back over to her.

She nods, "Sure. What is it?"

Sonic points to his cheek, "Right here. Can you hit me right here?"

She takes a step back, "What!?"

Sonic shakes his head as a grin spreads across his face, "Knock some sense into me."

Amy rolls her eyes, but gently taps Sonic's cheek with her knuckles. "Just go do the right thing," she says with a smirk.

Sonic nods back to her and is about to jet off, but stops and turns to her. "Also, thanks," Sonic shouts over to her.

"Just go already," Amy cries back.

Sonic sends her a thumbs up and rushes off behind a cloud of dust.

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When Sonic gets to the apartment complex, he skids to a stop. He looks around in confusion. Had Amy lied about Shadow moving or...

"Urge to maim has greatly increased."

Sonic turns when he sees the large robot and Rouge standing next to the apartment building.

“Oh hey, guys! Have you seen...” Sonic is about to ask before he feels the bullets spray under his feet. He practically dances in order to dodge the attack and bounces away, “Whoa! Tell your robo to lay off.”

Rouge isn't fazed by his come backs like she usually is. She's all business. “That was a warning shot, blue,” Rouge states as she places her hands on her hips.

“Are you serious?” Sonic asks with shock, “Dude, I just wanna talk to him.”

“And I'm just following orders,” Rouge says sternly.

“Just tell me where he is,” Sonic demands, clearly tired of this.

“He's gone,” Rouge retorts, “That's all you need to know.”

“Yeah, we'll see about that,” Sonic says with a smirk as he jets off.

There's a loud roar behind him and he recognizes it very vividly. It was Shadow's motorcycle. He looks behind him and sees Rouge is hot on his tail.

“Yikes,” Sonic skids to the side when she comes barreling in. Sonic hangs back and flips onto the roof of a car, standing on it like it's nothing.

Rouge grits her teeth and switches to autopilot. She flips off the bike and lands in front of the blue hero. She backs him onto the end of the car and sends a savage kick his way.

He falls back and skids across the asphalt to a slow halt, not expecting Rouge to actually attack him. He looks up and sees the bat girl flip back onto the bike and ride further ahead. “Are we seriously doing the whole car chase scene!? This is so cliché!” Sonic shouts out to literally no one. He sighs and stretches his legs before hopping onto another car. He waits until he gets close enough to the next and the next. He hops from one car to another until he meets up with Rouge again, to which he sticks his tongue out at her.

She grits her teeth and steers the bike over to the car Sonic is on and the car swivels off. She smirks and keeps her eyes ahead again, clearly proud of herself.

“Ya know, that was rude,” Sonic states.

Rouge looks over her shoulder and sees the blue hero standing on the back of the bike. She swerves and swivels, but Sonic has a firm grip and balance on it.

“Um... Hello? I'm used to riding on the wing of an airplane. You're not gunna shake me,” Sonic reminds her with a nasty tone.

She switches the bike back into autopilot again and spins up with the help of her wings and balances her feet on the seat of the motorcycle. “Haven't you caused him enough pain?” She asks with heat in her eyes.

“I'm gunna make it right,” Sonic shoots back.

Rouge shakes her head and sends a swift kick to Sonic's ankles, “You've done enough!”

Sonic flips off the back end of the bike and onto the front. His foot planted right on the handlebar as he angles the bike to the side.

Rouge wobbles a little, but balances herself back on with her wings. She leans in the opposite side and the bike steers upright again. “Everyone might love and adore you, but Shadow deserves better,” she retorts with anger.

“I know,” Sonic admits with sad eyes, “That’s why I’m gunna apologize and *change*.”

“An apology?” Rouge asks with anger as she lashes her leg out, “He was *devastated!*”

Sonic’s eyes widen when he hears that and her kick takes him off guard. The kick sends him up and the momentum tosses him into Rouge, tumbling them both off the bike. Sonic grabs her and breaks her fall as the bike skids next to them. “You okay?” Sonic asks.

Rouge pushes him away, “No, I’m not!” She grabs him by the wrist and yanks him up to his feet, “Shadow isn’t a weapon and neither is his son!”

“I know,” Sonic nods to her, “What I did was stupid. I just... I’ve never seen Shadow get his shit wrecked so bad before. I tried to resolve the fight by throwing Silver in the mix because that’s the only thing that I knew would stop Blaze, but... I realize now that we’re a family. I shouldn’t have put one of us in danger to save another. If one of us is hurt, we’re all hurt.”

Rouge looks like she’s in awe for a moment. She turns away with sadness.

“I know,” Sonic goes on, “I know what I did was stupid and impulsive and reckless and...”

“Get on,” she whispers to him.

“What?” Sonic asks with confusion.

Rouge pulls the bike back up and gets into the driver’s seat. “Get on,” she repeats.

Sonic is so happy he can feel the tears biting at his eyes, “Thank you.” He hops on the back and balances himself as they dart off.

“Don’t thank me,” she shouts back to him over the wind whipping around them, “Just fix this.”

Sonic gives her a look of determination and nods, his head held high as they drive through the night. They make their way to the bridge and Sonic’s eyes lock onto the moving truck up ahead. He looks up at the large metal beams sloping across the sides of the bridge. When he sees them dip down again, he calls out to Rouge, “This is my stop!” He shoots off the bike and lands on the red metal. He darts up the arch of it and boosts down the slope. It sends him flying at high speeds through the air. He zeros in on the truck, but overshoots it a little. He flails his arms around before landing hard on the car in front of it. Sonic feels the pain in his back, but gets to his feet anyway. He looks behind him and flashes a smile at the driver of the moving truck, knowing damn well it’s Shadow.

Shadow gives him a disgusted look before swerving around the car Sonic’s on and speeds down the street.

Sonic gives the moving truck a deflated look, “Ugh! You’re killin’ me, Shadow!” He dashes off the car he’s on and onto the next one. He angles himself up with the moving truck, but the moment he goes to jump, it swerves away from him. Sonic falls back, bounces on the street, and lands on another car. “That was cheap!” Sonic shouts out, seeing Shadow’s smirk in the side mirror.

Sonic sighs and tries to compose himself. He flips back onto his feet. He looks around and then up at the billboards coming up. He braces himself before taking a leap of faith. His hands catch onto the metal bar of one of the billboards and he launches himself off it. He flies through the air, arms

outstretched, and slides onto the top of the truck with a loud thump. He desperately tries to grasp at the ledge and when he finally does, he breathes a sigh of relief.

That relief is gone a moment later when the truck comes to a complete halt and he's flung forward. He tumbles across the ground like a ragdoll and just kind of lays there. That's just like Shadow. A sore loser to the bitter end.

Sonic shakily tries to pull himself up, but he's dragged out of the street by his leg and tossed on the side where the truck is parked.

"You," Shadow seethes down at him, "are crazy."

Sonic pants out heavily as he mutters, "I'd have to... to be in love with you."

Shadow pulls him up and thrusts him against the side of the truck, speaking through clenched teeth, "I have a baby in the truck. You have five minutes."

"You know I'm bad at timed tests," Sonic murmurs as he tries to catch his breath.

"Make it four," Shadow corrects with calm anger.

That really has Sonic flustered. There's so much and so little he could say in that window of time. He doesn't want to blurt out the first thing that comes to mind either because that might make it worse. So, instead he leans forward and kisses Shadow.

Shadow seems tense against him, but he eases into it. He furrows his brow and pulls Sonic against him as he kisses back desperately. Once he realizes what he's doing though, he pulls away and presses the back of his hand to his mouth. He gives Sonic an accusing look as he says, "If you think kissing me will make it better..."

Sonic shakes his head, "No, that's not it." He grips his head and looks down at the ground in shame, "I'm sorry. My mind is just..." He locks eyes with Shadow and give him a determined look, "Neither you or Silver are weapons. If anyone destroyed anything it was *me*. I'm the weapon. I destroyed everything we had with my stupid actions, Shadow. I don't even know what I'm thinking half the time. I just do things and then realize how messed up they are later. I kinda wish I had inhibitors for my head." He takes a step forward and he sees Shadow back away from him, "What I did was wrong. Sacrificing Silver for your life? That was the dumbest thing I've ever done. I'll never do that again. I promise. We're... We *were* a family. I just couldn't wrap my mind around that. You were the only thing important to me and that was wrong. I need to consider us all. As one unit."

Shadow glares at him and clenches his fist, "That *child* has nothing to do with anything that's happening to him. You told me we were going to protect him and give him a better future."

"The future," Sonic repeats with a nod, "There's so much I need to talk to you about all of that too, but... That's really just besides the point. That's my own mission. You're right. None of that has to do with Silver. He didn't cause any of it. If anyone caused it, it's me." Sonic takes one more step forward and gently rests his hands on Shadow's shoulders, "Shadow, I love you. And I love him. And I wanna help you raise him. I wanna be in your life. I know he's not part of me or whatever, but that stuff never mattered to me. I mean, look at Tails. We aren't biological brothers, but I still love him like he is. And Silver? I'm gunna love and protect him like he's my own. I promise."

Shadow looks so conflicted. He can barely look Sonic in the eye. He wants to hate him and tell him he's too late or that the words hurt too much to be forgiven. He wants to be angry at him. He had a long list of things he wanted to chastise him for, but it always goes up in smoke the moment he's

with him. Shadow grits his teeth, “Why do I let you keep doing this? I promised myself this was it.”

Sonic shakes his head and runs his hands down Shadow’s arms, “You aren’t over me and I sure as hell aren’t over you, Shadow.”

Shadow pushes Sonic up against the truck and looks like he’s about to punch him, but instead leans in and presses his mouth roughly against the hero’s. He slams his fist down against the truck, just at the side of Sonic’s head and pushes against him. His tongue feverishly explores Sonic’s mouth before pulling it away and whispering, “I don’t want this.”

Sonic nods his head and wraps his arms around Shadow’s back, “Yes, you do.”

Shadow’s fist uncurls and his fingers dig against the metal under him. He growls and it gets muffled by Sonic’s mouth. It melts into a moan and he takes in a sharp breath through his nose before kissing back roughly in response. He bites Sonic’s lip and releases his mouth, “I *hate* you.”

Sonic lets out a pained noise and licks the sore spot on his mouth. Despite that, his face is soft and welcoming for Shadow. He looks deep into his eyes and murmurs back, “I *love* you.”

Shadow grits his teeth, fighting with himself before his forehead collides with Sonic’s. He takes a moment, trying to keep his muscles tense with rage, but it all washes away without him telling it to. He finally opens his eyes and takes in those radiant emerald eyes full of hope and curses himself when he whispers, “I love you too.”

Sonic smiles at him and places a hand to his cheek.

Shadow lifts his hand to Sonic’s and nuzzles his face into the other’s hand. He bites at the glove angrily before letting it slip out of his teeth, “Get in the damn truck.”

Sonic doesn’t hesitate to do what he’s told. He climbs into the truck and shuts the door, but leans against the door when he sees the vicious black chao standing in front of Silver protectively. Sonic watches Shadow get in the other side and place a hand on the chao’s head, calming it. Sonic breathes a sigh of relief.

Shadow buckles his seat belt and glances over when he sees Rouge pull up next to him with his bike.

“Everything good?” She asks with a knowing grin.

Shadow looks away and blushes, “Yes.”

“Good,” she winks and heads off down the street.

Shadow gives her a stale look as she leaves and pulls the truck out of park, “So much for nothing.”

Sonic grins at him, “I had to go through two belligerent girls to get to you, Shads.”

Shadow shakes his head and says mockingly, “How valiant.”

“Wasn’t it you who said gender doesn’t matter,” Sonic points out as he lounges back and rests his feet on the dash.

“I suppose,” Shadow responds. He glances over at the blue hero who is resting his head against the window. He catches the small snores coming from him and lets it go for now. It does feel a bit gratifying knowing he’d done so much for him. A little. He’d never admit it out loud though.

Shadow pointedly ignores Rouge's face when he carries a sleeping Sonic into their new home. The moment he turns the key and takes his first step in though, it feels big and open. This was something he never thought he'd ever have. Not because he didn't think he'd ever afford it, but because he never thought he'd need it. It almost feels surreal.

He makes his way through the kitchen and down the hall and to the bedrooms. He opens the door and walks into the master bedroom and just awes at it for a moment. It's almost as big as his old living room. He looks down at Sonic and stubbornly tries not to admit to himself that he's glad he's walking in here with him. Otherwise, he'd probably having an internal panic attack.

He spreads the baby blanket down and places Sonic against it gently. He just notices the dark circles under his eyes. He blames his anger on not seeing it beforehand. Sonic must have been equally upset about this whole ordeal as him. He feels more pain than comfort from that though. He places a kiss on his forehead before walking back out, closing the door behind him.

The others are already bringing in the boxes while Cream is playing with Silver and Chocola. He meets Rouge over by the front door and takes the box she's struggling to carrying with one hand.

"Show off," Rouge says as she twists her lips into a frown.

Shadow just rolls his eyes, "I'm just helping."

They both turn to the back sliding door where Omega is walking inside. He sets down about ten boxes and speaks, "I have located an entrance someone my size can fit through."

Shadow smirks at him and then turns back to Rouge who's mouth is gapped open, "Who's showing off now?"

Rouge just tries to shrug it off, "Whatever. My expertise lies in flying, treasure hunting, and spying." She looks around and then stops before turning back to Shadow, "Wait. If Sonic's here, then where are his things?"

Shadow smacks his face and lets it slide down, "Back in Westopolis... Probably." He sighs and turns to go walk out, but gasps when he sees Amy hovering over the doorstep.

She jumps down as Tails lands next to her and she presents the box and guitar to him, "Nope. It's right here."

Shadow lets out a sigh of relief and take the box with his free hand as Amy walks into the home with the guitar slung around her shoulder, "Thank you."

"Of course," Tails replies as he smiles at him, "How's Sonic doing?"

"He's sleeping," Shadow informs him.

Tails finds comfort in knowing that, "That's good. I'm glad he's finally sleeping again."

Shadow just nods, but looks away. He welcomes them inside and closes the door with his foot. They walk over to the living room and he places the boxes down with the stacks of the other ones.

"We would have gotten here sooner if we weren't," Tails goes to say as he returns a stale look with Amy, "...assessing damages."

"Damages?" Shadow asks with confusion, "Did Sonic...?"

Amy holds her hands up in the air to stop him, “No, it was all me this time. I might have gone a little overboard.”

“A little?” Tails scoffs, “My porch is nonexistent.”

Amy gives him a sheepish smile, “I said I was going to fix it.”

Tails just shrugs, “It’s fine. By now, I should just anticipate collateral damage when Sonic visits.”

“Perhaps I’ll drop by after my shift and help,” Shadow suggests lightly.

“Not necessary,” Tails goes to tell him, “Although, it might be helpful if you drop by anyway. You and Sonic can take the Tornado, fly to Angel Island, and figure out what’s going on with Knuckles.”

“Yes,” Shadow nods with a snarl, “I’d like to find out first hand why he stole my Chaos Emerald.”

Amy just laughs and places her hands on her hips, “You’re about as protective over that gem as Knuckles is the Master Emerald.”

“You know what kind of power the Chaos Emeralds contain. Relying on that big rock isn’t enough to stop them like he claims. The most effective way is to keep them separated,” Shadow explains with a grim tone. His stare hardens when he sees them giving him a funny look like they can see his stubbornness in Knuckles. Shadow shakes his head and hates being compared to that primitive echidna. He has Shadow’s respects, but he doesn’t fully trust him yet. “Although, there might be one small problem with your plan,” Shadow says to Tails.

Tails blinks like he doesn’t understand what he miscalculated.

“I can’t fly a plane,” Shadow states.

“Oh,” Tails replies with a relieved laugh, “That’s what you’re worried about? Don’t worry. Sonic knows how to pilot the Tornado. It’s *his* plane after all.”

Shadow gives him a shocked look like he’s bluffing.

“I’m not joking, Shadow. Sonic taught me how to fly a plane. I can fly on my own. I don’t need a plane,” Tails goes on, “It’s Sonic that likes to travel by air. We used to live on an island surrounded by water. It must have just been something he picked up from feeling trapped on it. You know Sonic, the sky’s the limit with him. And beyond even.”

“Apparently, I don’t know him that well,” Shadow looks away a bit ashamed. He needed to keep an open mind with Sonic. He’s afraid his callus nature is causing Sonic to fear sharing parts himself.

Tails waves his hand and laughs, “Don’t even worry. It’s not like he goes around boasting about it. He’s more focused on his image. He leaves the tinkering to me. He’s good with coming up with mockups though.”

“He… designs things,” Shadow states more than asks.

“Oh yeah,” Amy chimes in with a smile, “It started with designing durable shoes. He had his own clothing line for awhile. I may or may not have bought a few things from it.”

Tails shakes his head and adds, “I kept telling him that in order for him to make an actual profit from it, he had to sell some stuff in blue. It would be more recognizable. But he wouldn’t listen to me. He kept trying to push red.”



“It sold me,” Amy admits with a laugh.

“It had Sonic’s name on it,” Tails points out, “You probably would have bought it regardless of what it looked like.”

She rubs the back of her neck and looks away with embarrassment.

Shadow doesn’t say anything. He’s more than ashamed for not knowing all of this. It seemed like he didn’t know Sonic as well as he initially thought. He tries to slide away from the two as they continue to talk and makes his way back over to the boxes.

Shadow sees Omega coming through the back with the couch and he helps position it where he wants it. He sticks with Omega the majority of the time and helps with the rest of the heavy lifting, but leaving the pieces of the bed out of the bedroom on purpose. He uses that as a distraction until the truck is empty.

Their friends stick around for a bit longer than Shadow is comfortable with, but he doesn’t say anything about it. He just begins to unpack the dishes and put them in the cupboards. He eyes the abundance of space within them with uneasiness.

“You’re staring at the silver wear like it’s going to attack you,” Rouge jokes as she leans against the counter next to him.

“Sorry,” Shadow says as he closes the cabinet door, “There’s just so much space.”

“That’s what you’re worried about?” Rouge says dismissively, “When the kid gets older you’ll be complaining about not having enough room for everything.”

Shadow glances at the baby in Cream’s arms and how he’s smiling and playing with a stuffed animal. He smiles a bit and nods, “Yeah, you’re right.”

She snickers when she sees what Shadow’s looking at. She pulls herself up onto the counter top and crosses her legs over one another, “I also heard you’re going to pay Knuckles a visit. Try not to kill him, yeah?”

Shadow folds his arms across his chest and smirks at her, “I make no promises.”

Rouge sighs and rolls her eyes at him, “You two were making such great strides until now.”

“And then he stole my emerald,” Shadow points out.

“He’s the guardian of the Master Emerald. He must have his reasons,” Rouge explains.

“Would have been great if he filled me in on said reasons before I was getting my face pummeled into the pavement,” Shadow states with a snarl.

“Keep an open mind, hon,” she reminds him.

Open mind. Right. He’s bad at that. Especially when it comes to his stuff. He thinks he can manage it though. For a bit anyway. Until he gets answers.

## Dreams and the Future



### Chapter Seven: Dreams and the Future

Sonic feels his eyes opening and it's dark all around him. He's sleeping on the ground on Silver's baby blanket in a room he doesn't recognize. He gets up quickly and examines his surroundings. Everything is bare and empty, so he ventures out the door and down a hallway. He sees a light on toward the end of the hall and peeks around the corner.

Silver's soft whines and cries come from the living room. He sees Shadow trying to comfort the disturbed child, but it doesn't seem like anything is really working. Shadow tries to hush him and pulls him up into his arms and walks back and forth with him.

Sonic frowns because that doesn't really seem to be working either. He looks down at the ground thoughtfully before smirking and curling into a ball. He rolls out into the living room and pops out, surprising them both. He gives them a pose and says with a snarky tone, "Looks like *someone* missed me."

Silver is silent for a moment as he watches Sonic with big eyes. He fusses in Shadow's arms a bit and gives the blue hero grabby hands like he wants to be picked up by him.

Shadow sees this and hands the child over to Sonic begrudgingly, "Correction: We both missed you."

"Awww," Sonic coos before picking the baby up into his arms. He rests his forehead to Silver's and makes little baby noises in response to Silver's. He smooths down the spikes on his forehead and laughs when they spring back out into place again. He turns to Shadow and places a kiss on his

temple before responding a bit more seriously, “I missed you too.”

Shadow tries to hide the fact that he’s smiling by walking back over to the pieces of their bed set. Now that Sonic is awake, he can take over looking after Silver and Shadow can move their things into the bedroom.

Sonic looks around at the living room in awe. He gawks at the small skylight on the ceiling. He glances out the glass sliding door at the large backyard. The house was pretty spacious and Sonic wonders if that’s the whole point. “Nice pad. How much was it?” Sonic asks curiously.

“First of all, it’s our home,” Shadow responds from over his shoulder, “And secondly, let me worry about finances.”

Sonic shrugs a little and looks unsure, “I just kinda feel like a freeloader is all.”

“Get those thoughts out of your head right now,” Shadow demands with offense as he turns sharply toward him and stands, “You have a fulltime job taking care of Silver. You are helping me raise him and that is priority number one for me. Above all else, we will make sure he has a good future.”

Sonic looks shocked for a second, but ends up giving Shadow a determined look. “Alright,” he responds before taking a step toward him, “but I need to talk to you about something. It’s kinda related to this whole topic about the future and stuff.”

Shadow brushes him off, “I would never hurt you. That Mephiles Blaze spoke of is not me.”

“Y-yeah, but...” Sonic tries to say.

“And you won’t die. I will make sure of that,” Shadow adds.

“Shadow, you’re not listening to me. In the future...”

Shadow holds his hand up to stop him, “Time is nonlinear, Sonic.”

Sonic blinks a few times like he doesn’t understand.

“Time branches off into different paths depending on the choices we make,” Shadow explains to him, “The you from the future may be dead, but the path you walk will not sync up to that timeline. I won’t let it. Do you understand?”

“I guess, but...”

“Then, there’s no further discussion,” Shadow concludes like he’s done talking about it, “Do not let it trouble you any longer.”

Sonic was hoping to talk about this more. He doesn’t really feel more at ease, but he trusts Shadow’s words anyway. So, he drops it.

Sonic looks around at the empty boxes and how their things are mostly put away. He wonders just how long he was out for. Everyone must have helped already and left. “Sorry I wasn’t more of a help,” Sonic says sheepishly.

“It’s fine,” Shadow responds as he hauls the pieces of the bed set into his arms, “As long as you’re happy, healthy, and comfortable in your new home, that’s all I care about.”

Sonic follows Shadow down the hall into the bedroom. He watches Shadow begin to put the bed together with the help of a small screwdriver set. Sonic holds Silver to his side as the child watches

intently at Shadow putting the pieces together.

“We’re cool now, right?” Sonic asks a bit hesitantly, “You aren’t mad?”

“I was, but not anymore,” Shadow states as his full attention is on the task at hand, “You made a mistake and instead of communicating with you I shut you out. I expected the worst from you and that was my own mistake. I realize it’s difficult for you to open up to me if I have all my barriers up.”

“Right,” Sonic rubs the back of his neck and gives Shadow an unsure look, “Way to analyze the situation.”

“I also realize I don’t know you as much as I thought,” Shadow continues a bit quieter.

Sonic gives Shadow a nervous look and unconsciously places his hand over his heart, “Y-yeah? Like... like what? What don’t you know about me?”

“Like your affinity for aviation,” Shadow explains as he begins to screw the framing in place, “Or that you used to have a clothing line.”

“Ohhhh! That stuff,” Sonic says like he’s relieved, “Wait. Clothing line?” He takes a second to think and then it pops into his head, “Oh yeah. I did have one at one point, didn’t I?” Sonic notes the sad look on Shadow’s face and kneels down next to him, “Hey, it’s not like you don’t know me. I did spontaneous stuff like that all the time. I wanted to try everything. Like, what lead up to the clothing company thing was my interest in racecars and racing gear. But that stuff doesn’t make me...*me*. I was that kid that wanted to do something one minute and immediately lose interest in it the next.”

Shadow glances up at Sonic once before twisting in the last screw into the framing. He halts when Sonic takes the screwdriver away from him gently and leans in to kiss him. Shadow closes his eyes and melts into it.

Sonic pulls away and smiles down at him, “You probably know me more than I know myself. You always know what my next move is going to be.”

“I just wish I knew more about who you were in the past too,” Shadow murmurs quietly.

“There ya go again, Shadow,” Sonic says as he rolls his eyes, “You’re too focused on the past. Knowing who I am right now is more important. I’m not the same person as much as you were the same person. But if it makes you feel better I’m sure Tails has a few old photo albums you can skim through.”

Shadow nods back looking a bit calmer after that, “I’d like that.”

“Sweet,” Sonic winks at him.

Silver gets antsy in Sonic’s arms and squirms around uncomfortably. He looks up at Sonic and gives him big, watery eyes and whines.

“Looks like it’s past Silvy’s bedtime. We’ll talk more after I put him to sleep,” Sonic announces before walking out of the bedroom and down the hall. He hushes the grumpy child as he walks into the room. He boops the baby on the nose before placing him into the crib and stifles his laughter as the child just scowls at him. “Wow! You have Shadow’s scowl down pat, little buddy,” Sonic jokes.

Silver just cries in response and gives Sonic grabby hands.

Sonic frowns when he sees that. He didn’t think Silver would miss him so much. He hopes he didn’t

stress the little guy out. He pulls Silver back up into his arms and the child settles down again. He holds him close to his chest and rocks him a bit. "It's okay, buddy. I'm here now. There's nothing to worry about," Sonic whispers to him and he feels the kid nuzzling into his chest from the reverberation of his voice.

Silver is quiet in his arms as he listens intently to Sonic's heartbeat. His eyes keep fluttering shut and opening again as if he's tired but doesn't want to fall asleep.

Sonic slides his hand down the back of the child's head and murmurs to him, "I'll be here when you wake up, Silver."

Silver rustles in his arms a little, but manages to settle down.

"I promise," Sonic whispers with certainty as he holds the child securely against him.

The baby makes a few noises before his eyes flutter closed again. They stay closed this time as he presses his face against Sonic's chest.

Sonic just holds him for a bit, rocking him back and forth. He wants to be absolutely sure Silver is fast asleep when he walks out because he doesn't want him to wake up alone.

When Silver's soft snores become more regular, Sonic carefully places him into the crib. He winces when he sees the baby squirm around, but fast as lightning Sonic places the stuffed animal next to him and Silver latches onto it. Sonic sighs in relief and drapes the blanket on top of him and quietly walks out of the room. He closes the door lightly behind him and makes his way back down the hall, into the room Shadow's in.

The bed is already set up and Shadow is positioning the mattress in place. Sonic helps him put the sheets and comforter on before plopping the pillows down against the headrest.

Shadow tosses the small tool set to the side of the room and comments, "He fell asleep easy tonight."

Sonic shoots him a look of confusion, "I dunno. He was kinda fussy."

Shadow just grunts at him.

Sonic frowns because he gets the hint. Their old neighbors were probably singing their praises when they saw Shadow packing his stuff and leaving. "Thank you for everything," Sonic whispers with a slight laugh, "And uh... also sorry for everything."

Shadow makes his way back over to Sonic and gives him a serious look. He pulls Sonic in by the waist and holds him up against his chest. His eyes are intense as he stares into Sonic's as he whispers back, "It's in the past. I should have never let you go. Whatever happens between us we can always work it out. We've been through much worse than this." He pulls Sonic in closer and trails kisses up the hero's neck as he continues, "And you've forgiven me for far worse."

Sonic guides Shadow's face up to his and he leans in, kissing him roughly. Their lips meld together and slide in unison. When they separate Sonic murmurs, "You have no idea how much I missed you."

Shadow growls and wraps his arms around Sonic's waist, pulling him off the ground. He walks over to the bed and pushes Sonic against it, devouring his mouth once more. He feels Sonic slide back against the mattress and he climbs on top. His hands glide up and down Sonic's body as if he's trying to commit each dip and curve to memory. "I assure you," Shadow responds breathlessly, "I missed you just as much."

Sonic grins up at him as his body blushes under Shadow's fingertips. Shadow's vulnerability is bittersweet to him. On one hand, he loves how open he is to admitting something like that. On the other, it's at the cost of such heartache. It's nice to hear either way. He places a kiss to his lips and gasps when he feels Shadow press back into it desperately.

"Tell me what you want," Shadow murmurs against his lips before pecking them once more, "Tell me how I can make you feel good."

Sonic can feel every inch of his skin prick from those words. He lifts his legs up and wraps them around Shadow's hips, guiding him forward. "I just want *you*," Sonic whispers back.

Shadow nods once and lets Sonic guide him in. He stops and takes a moment to marvel at the intense heat. He loves how this feels familiar and welcoming. It feels like home.

Pulling Shadow down lower just to feel the warmth of his body, Sonic nuzzles the side of his face against his and lets out a relieved sigh when Shadow locks into place. "Oh yeah," Sonic's voice ghosts against Shadow's cheek. Sonic feels Shadow's hips snap up once and it's a welcomed force. Sonic's voice is a bit louder when he repeats, "Oh yeah!"

Shadow clamps his hand down against Sonic's mouth, but still revels in the reverberations of his voice. Feeling it against his chest and palm. Shadow groans when he feels the coil of arousal tighten deep within him. There's nothing he loves more than Sonic's vigor at his command, but he doesn't want to be too loud tonight.

Sonic carefully slides away from Shadow's hand and whispers in the quiet room, "Remember when you had me up against the moving truck?"

Shadow bites his lip and closes his eyes, taking in the memory fully, "Yes."

"That was hot," Sonic snickers under his breath, "Almost thought you were gunna reprimand me with your body."

Shadow's hand clutches tightly on the sheets. He wanted to. He wanted to so bad. The time and place wasn't right. He almost wonders why Sonic is bringing it up. He could have gotten away with never speaking of it again. He could have...

"Shadow," Sonic murmurs quietly with a mischievous grin.

Shadow opens one eye to look down at him and just grunts his question to him.

"Make me pay for hurting you," Sonic whispers as his legs tighten around Shadow's hips.

Shadow takes Sonic's hip in a firm grip and thrusts into him once rougher than the others. They moan in unison in response. Shadow clenches his teeth and Sonic is giving Shadow an encouraging grin. "Masochist," Shadow snarls angrily. It's supposed to be an insult, but he's too stubborn to admit that this is good. Really, *really* good.

Sonic's eyes are threatening to close, wanting to shut all of his senses off just to feel this, but he keeps eye contact with Shadow. Sonic just hums pleasantly as he inches close enough to kiss Shadow's lips.

Shadow drives into him again, keeping a steady rhythm as he buries himself deeper and deeper into that quivering heat. Sonic's lips are intoxicating and he can't help himself. He wants more. He loves how Sonic is an untamable force and he wants just an ounce of that wild nature within him.

Sonic's moan interrupts their kiss and he falls back against the mattress, quills a mess as he pants heavily and eyes shining with pure bliss. Shadow unravels him in ways he's only dreamt of. His fingers dig into the sheets and his heart is soaring. When Shadow is this close to him, he feels infinite. He feels free. He's missed it so badly.

Shadow narrows his eyes and pushes his full length in completely and holds, watching Sonic choke at the sudden intrusion. Shadow locks eyes with him as he lowers his brow, "There's no punishing you. You enjoy it too much." Shadow pulls out and pushes back in with feverish force. He feels Sonic tense under him from it and he drinks in every quivering muscle. "How the hell are you suppose to pay for what you've done?" Shadow questions.

Sonic winces, but strains a smirk on his face, "By letting you get all your pent up frustrations out on me." Sonic bites his lip and feels his toes curl as all of his nerves spark to life at once. "It's a win-win," Sonic whispers hotly before finishing, "'cause you're a sadist."

Shadow feels the anger rising inside him. He wants to prove Sonic wrong so badly, but the blood in his veins feel like lava. It's exhilarating. He grits his teeth and wants to wipe Sonic's knowing smirk right off his face. No matter what he does in this instance, Sonic wins. He knows Shadow too well.

Shadow feels his impulse control crumbling away. His steel will is melting into nothing. He wants control so badly, but it's falling away like water trickling through his fingers. He hates himself for twisting Sonic around and pressing the hero's face into the mattress as he pushes inside him again. He thrusts into Sonic vigorously, feeling that heat welcoming him once more and beckoning him to continue. Shadow can feel his eyes rolling in the back of his head, willing his hips to go faster.

"Just... admit it," Sonic croons out, half his face mashed against the mattress, "Admit you like this."

Shadow can hear the arousal pulsating in his ears. It's all around him. Completely immersed in boiling ecstasy. He leans against Sonic's back and pulls his head up roughly, growling into his ear, "This is your fault. You did this."

Sonic licks his lips and turns his head just enough for Shadow to see his smirk, "I did."

Shadow groans and muffles it into Sonic's shoulder, "I hate you. I hate you so much." Each thrust of his hips though says otherwise. He hates being like this. He hates not being in control. He hates how much he loves it. He nuzzles into the side of Sonic's face, biting and kissing his neck as he fights with himself.

"You love me," Sonic whispers to him and chokes on a moan when he feels Shadow's hips snap roughly, "You love this."

"Shut up," Shadow snarls and shoves Sonic's face back into the mattress.

Sonic braces his arm up and fights to lift his head back up as he replies with a shaky voice, "Just let go. Enjoy it. Isn't it kinda liberating?"

"How can you say something like that?" Shadow asks with heat to his voice.

"Because I love you," Sonic replies back, "All of you. Your strengths. Your flaws. Good and bad. Who cares about what's right and wrong. I want all of it. I want *you*."

Shadow's hips stop for a brief moment as he looks down at Sonic in awe. When said like that it sounds less like a taunt and more like he actually means it. His hand slides away from Sonic's head and he wraps his arms around the hero's body, holding him close

Sonic closes his eyes and hums happily at the contact of it, "Let me have it."

Shadow nods and braces one hand on the headboard. His hips start moving again and he slides his other hand over Sonic's mouth, muffling the noises he's making. He leans in and murmurs into the hero's ear, "As you wish."

Sonic feels laughter bubbling up to his throat, but moans when he feels Shadow's hand tighten on his mouth. He hears Shadow's heavy breathing against his neck and he can tell that he's finally let down his barriers and enjoying himself now. He groans once more and goes boneless against Shadow's powerful hips.

Shadow presses his smirk into Sonic's neck and nips at the tender flesh. He revels in the shudder that rolls up Sonic's spine. He loves him. His body. His voice. Bending to his will, but feeling powerful because of it. He's so unclear who's in control at this point, but it doesn't much matter. He's submerged in this sensation and dripping with lust.

He feels Sonic panting and biting at his palm as his body shudders with the warning of rippling release. His moans are muffled by Shadow's hand and he keeps it firmly in place. Shadow pants with him and snarls, "Not yet."

Sonic muffles a protest.

Shadow slows his rhythm so Sonic can calm himself a bit. He trails kisses up the side of his face and murmurs, "A few weeks away from my touch and you're reduced to weak virgin? I know you're better than that, Sonic."

Sonic grunts and grips the sheets, nodding back in response. He braces himself and has a look of determination on his face.

Shadow splays his fingers apart and slides two digits into Sonic's mouth, prodding into the slick heat. He makes a blissful noise as he feels Sonic's tongue sliding against them and he pecks the hero's temple as a reward, "Good boy." Shadow picks up his pace again, enjoying the hot pants against his fingers.

Sonic wraps his lips around Shadow's fingers and sucks them eagerly. He loves Shadow's sultry voice in his ear. It sets his whole body ablaze. His body feels so full and whole. He feels complete. Maybe a bit too much because he can feel the arousal tipping him close to the edge. He hangs on though, muffling his moans against Shadow's fingers desperately. He grunts out and nips at the pads of Shadow's fingers as his hips meet with Shadow's willingly.

Shadow presses his fingers against Sonic's tongue, fighting and prodding with it as he licks his lips hungrily. He almost wants to turn Sonic around just so he can taste him again. He runs his tongue up Sonic's neck and sucks on it instead, sinking his teeth into him. He gets the quiet gasp from the hero and he prods his fingers in a bit deeper, feeling Sonic submitting to him. He kisses Sonic's neck and trails them back to his shoulder blade. His fingers slip out of his mouth and position back onto the hero's hip.

Sonic pants loudly after he feels Shadow's fingers leave his mouth and the moist sensation of them gripping his hips. He bites his lip and feels Shadow's hips getting faster. A smile crosses his face when he feels the familiar hitch in Shadow's movements. He's giving Sonic what he wants. He's driving into him at just the right angle and he's consumed with ecstasy. He holds on though, waiting for Shadow's command.

Shadow grits his teeth. The way Sonic is so willing and open to him drives him mad. He grips his



fingers tighter onto his hips and thrusts in once more before holding. He feels Sonic cringe from it and it heats his body to the core. He leans in close and murmurs, "Give me your release."

Just like an uncontrollable wave, it hits Sonic's body. It's almost painful how quick it happens, but it's welcomed. It makes it that much better.

Shadow growls, feeling Sonic's body coming undone under him and it's enough to push him over the edge. He holds Sonic close so he can feel the aftershocks as he rides out his own release within his fluttering walls.

They stay like that for a moment, basking in the sensation of feeling whole and complete. Shadow helps Sonic back against the bed gently after their breaths slow down once more. He lays down next to Sonic and pulls the comforter around them as he feels the blue hero cuddling up next to him.

Sonic is smirking at him in the dark, "What was all the virgin talk? You came right after that."

Shadow doesn't appreciate Sonic's snarky response. Especially now when all he wants to do is relax in their afterglow. "Just come here," he says a bit irritated as he pulls Sonic against his chest and rests his chin onto the hero's head.

Sonic doesn't push it though. He knew it was a heat of the moment thing and if he's honest with himself it really got him off. He just nuzzles into his chest and sighs contently.

Shadow's voice hits his ear a moment later with a bit of a concerned and pensive tone, "You truly love me as I am?"

Sonic perks his head up a bit and Shadow's chin slides off his head. He looks up at him with a confident smile, "Of course I do."

Shadow doesn't seem too sure though, "The stubbornness. The anger. The need to take control. The closed mindedness."

"Ya don't have to give me a whole laundry list," Sonic snickers as he wraps an arm around Shadow's waist, "I've seen you at your worst. You've seen my dirty laundry too."

Shadow raises an eyebrow.

"Metaphors. I talking in metaphors, Shads," Sonic clarifies with a snort, "Accepting that your significant other has flaws...It's something you kinda have to do in a relationship."

"But you're flawless," Shadow states as he places a hand on Sonic's cheek.

Sonic's face burns bright red and he buries his face in his hands, "Geez, Shadow! Way to make a guy blush!"

Shadow lets the façade fall and he smirks, "It was a joke. I understand what you're insinuating."

Sonic peeks one eye out from his hands before unveiling a pout on his face, "Yeah, well... Your flaws kinda make you suave and cool."

Shadow gives him a stale look, "I'm not attempting to do so."

Sonic flails his hands up and gives him a jealous look, saying with a whispered shout, "Yeah, I know! And that makes it like ten times cooler!"

Shadow just rolls his eyes, "If I remember correctly, you were the one declaring that you 'invented

cool.' So, your statement is null and void."

Sonic rolls over with his back facing Shadow and grumbles.

Shadow comes up behind him and holds Sonic so his back is up against his chest. His hands slide up the hero's chest and cuddles up close to his shoulder, "Don't let something so trivial trouble you. Now, settle down and let's get some rest."

"I slept all day. I'm not even tired," Sonic whines a little, but feels himself nodding off despite himself. Shadow's even breaths are so soothing. He's a bit bitter when he feels the smirk pressed against his shoulder, but he succumbs to sleep anyway.

Everything is dark and quiet when something stirs him awake. He can hear soft sobs. At first, he thinks it's Silver, but when he really listens to them it sounds significantly different. He opens his eyes and sees a figure in the corner of the room. He doesn't know how, but he knows that it's Chaos despite being shaped just like him.

When he gets out of bed, everything feels weird and otherworldly. Each step he walks closer to the figure, the more and more the room fades away and is replaced with the lush greenery of Angel Island. But an Angel Island that isn't in ruins.

"Whoa. Must be one of those dreams where you can control your body," Sonic whispers to himself, "Neat." He marches over to the figure and smiles down at him, "What's wrong, buddy? Why so blue? Ya know, besides lookin' like me."

Chaos looks down at his hands very focused, "This form is so strange."

"I dunno," Sonic shrugs before sitting down on the soft grass, "I think it's pretty awesome."

"I guess," Chaos responds, "At least I have a vessel now."

Sonic leans over and wipes the tear away from his eye, "I heard you crying. Wanna talk about it?"

"I can't find him," Chaos says quietly.

"Who?" Sonic asks.

*"Please, stop talking in your sleep. I need to wake up early tomorrow."*

Chaos perks his head up suddenly and looks around frantically, "What was that?"

"Oh," Sonic replies as he taps his finger to his chin, "Just Shads. He probably has to get up for work in a few hours."

Chaos sinks down a little like he's disappointed, "Oh." He pulls his knees up to his chest and begins crying into his arms again.

"Hey, easy there. We'll find him," Sonic reassures as he pats his back, "Don't cry."

"I've always been able to sense his presence," Chaos chokes out, "but even with the aid of all seven Chaos Emeralds, I can't feel him anymore."

"No worries," Sonic smiles at him confidently, "Just tell me who he is and I'll find him in a flash. I'm Sonic the Hedgehog! Fastest thing alive!"

Chaos hiccups on breaths like it's painful to even breathe. He lifts his head and tears are pouring

from his eyes like waterfalls. Chaos opens his mouth and gasps painfully like he's drowning, "Iblis."

Sonic frowns when he hears that. The clouds roll in and it's suddenly dark. It begins to rain heavily and all the lush grass they're sitting upon is getting consumed by water. Sonic stands up suddenly, feeling the water creeping up his ankles. "H-hey, easy," Sonic says nervously, "I-I know where he is! He's in the future! He's the monster totally trashing the place!"

Chaos turns his head sharply to Sonic and glares at him, "You're lying. I'd still be able to sense him. We live in the past, present, and future. There is no time where we live." Chaos stands and snaps his hands up, wrapping his fingers around Sonic's neck, "And he's not a monster!"

Sonic gasps for air. The water is rising all around him and he's panicking. He grasps at Chaos' hands to pull them away, but they go through them like water. Sonic lets out a strangled cry, "H-help!"

*"Sonic!"*

Sonic's eyes dart around frantically. He can hear Shadow, but he can't see him. He wishes he were here because the water is rising to his neck and he's frozen with fear. "Please, don't," Sonic pleads, "Please."

Chaos just cries harder and the water rises faster.

Sonic angles his head up and takes one final inhale of air before it rises over his nose. He struggles in Chaos' grip and flails around until the last air bubbles leave his mouth. He's gazing up at the sky and how it's blood red, turning everything a murky auburn. He feels himself slowly losing consciousness as he lifts his hand up toward the surface of the water.

He feels a hand grab his and he's pulled out of the water suddenly. He coughs and chokes out, lungs burning within his chest. He's heaving, trying to refocus his blurry eyes.

"Sonic, are you alright?" Shadow asks as he's gripping his arms rather roughly.

Sonic looks around and sees their bedroom again. He hangs his head a bit, but gives Shadow a thumbs up indicating that he is in fact alright.

"You stopped breathing," Shadow informs him worriedly, "I wasn't sure what to do. Should I take you to the emergency room? Should I...?"

Sonic lifts his hand to stop Shadow, "I'm fine. I'm fine. Gimme some space, will ya?"

Shadow reluctantly moves back a little, but his eyes are still watching him intently.

Sonic takes in a few more deep breaths before evening them out.

"You were talking in your sleep," Shadow murmurs quietly, "I don't believe I caught what you were saying, but... Were you dreaming?"

Sonic sits and tries to remember the dream. He thought he knew what it was, but the moment the adrenaline kicked in it left his mind. He can't seem to get it back either. With a lack of a better way to put it, he responds, "I think it was a nightmare. I was drowning." That much he does remember.

Shadow seems a bit more relieved when he hears that. It was still scary, but knowing the reason for it put him at ease. Shadow lays back down and holds the comforter up for him, "Settle back down and try to get some rest. I'll wake you if you start to struggle again."

Sonic looks down at the bed and then back at Shadow. He kind of wants to pass on that offer. He doesn't want to go to sleep and fall back into that nightmare. "I'm... uh gunna get something to drink," Sonic tells him before standing up and walking over to the door.

Shadow just nods and pulls the blanket over himself, not wanting to bother Sonic about it further.

Sonic makes his way into the kitchen and turns on the light that's over the sink. He shuffles around the new kitchen in search of a glass. When he finds it, he fills it up and drinks it like he needs oxygen in his lungs. Maybe his dream was trying to tell him he's thirsty or something.

He feels himself shudder when the sensation of drowning washes over him again and his spines prick a little from it. He takes a deep breath and makes his way back to the hallway, but stops. He sees a phone with a memo pad next to it and Sonic grumbles to himself, "There's a thing called voicemail, Shadow." He picks up the pen that's next to it and is about to write a snarky note for Shadow to read in the morning, but halts his hand.

He looks down the hall at the soft teal glow from the baby's room and remembers Shadow's words about him having a clothing line in the past. He taps the pen against the pad of paper a few times thoughtfully before grabbing it. He makes his way back into the kitchen and sits down at the table and starts doodling. He wonders what kind of shoes would look good on Silver. He definitely wants them to be stylish, but he wonders if they need to be durable like Shadow's. Especially since Silver will probably possess a lot of Shadow's abilities. Maybe he could talk to Tails about it to see what he thinks. It's easier to make something after Tails gives him a framework to work with.

Sonic scribbles some ideas down until the morning sun trickles in through the window. He drops his pen and gasps when he hears Silver crying. He rushes into the room and scoops the child up, whispering to him, "Told ya I'd be here when you woke up."

Silver settles down when he sees Sonic's face and smacks his small hands against Sonic's chest happily.

Sonic pretends to act hurt, "Ugh! Oh no. You're... too strong!" Sonic leans back a little and is extremely melodramatic when he wails out, "I'm no match for the Ultimate Life Form!"

Silver squeals excitedly and pounds his little baby hands down faster, totally buying Sonic's acting.

Sonic laughs with Silver and pulls him in close for a hug, holding him securely against his chest. He places a kiss on top of the child's head and watches as the kid gnaws on his fist. Sonic asks with a coo, "Is the Ultimate Life Form hungry?"

Silver babbles sloppily between the drool and knuckles against his gums.

Sonic takes that as a yes as he walks out of the bedroom and down the hall. He sees Shadow stalk out of their room tiredly. Sonic stops and frowns at him. "I didn't wake you up, did I?" Sonic asks a bit concerned.

"Hm?" Shadow grunts and looks up like he just noticed Sonic was there, "Oh. No. Had trouble sleeping." He walks down the hall with Sonic and sits down at the kitchen table with a grumble, "I feel like death..."

"Call off," Sonic states like it's the simplest solution ever as he places Silver in his highchair.

"I've been doing so for the past couple weeks," Shadow responds with a bite to his voice.

Sonic looks down a bit guilty.

Shadow looks up and notices it. He sighs and shakes his head, "I didn't mean it like that."

"I know," Sonic says with a half smile, "I guess I kinda forget how unforgiving your schedule can be."

"It's something I chose," Shadow replies absently. He glances down at the notepad on the table and reaches for it.

Sonic rushes for it before Shadow can grab it.

Shadow raises an eyebrow at him, "What was that?"

Sonic glances back and forth as he hides it behind his back, "N-nothing. Just... ya know, scribbles."

"Scribbles," Shadow smirks at him like he's suddenly intrigued. He gets up and reaches around for it.

Sonic scrambles backward and runs around the counter until Shadow is directly across from him. He side steps back and forth in the opposite direction as Shadow, matching his speed. "Don't you have to get ready for work or somethin'?" Sonic asks with a pout.

Shadow reaches across the counter, but reels his hand back when Sonic smacks it. It isn't hard, but it is childish and it makes him smirk wider. "I have plenty of time for that," Shadow responds as he darts to the left, but halts to a stop when he sees Sonic dart right.

"Thought you felt like death," Sonic retaliates, "Got a lot of energy, huh?"

"Seeing your lovely face in the morning gives me all the energy I need for the day," Shadow shoots back, laying on the charm hard.

Sonic looks offended because he's sure Shadow stole that line from him at one point. He needs to copyright his phrases from now on. He gasps when Shadow braces his hands on the counter and flips over it. Just as Sonic is about to dash away, Shadow's hand snaps up and snatches the notepad from his hands.

"Shiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii—" Sonic hisses, but glances over at Silver dragging out the word as his brain tries to figure out how to save himself from this situation, "--oot!" Sonic goes to grab it back, but Shadow's hand on his face stops him.

"No swearing in front of the kid, remember?" Shadow teases him.

Sonic sighs and shakes his head, "Fine. I give. Whatever." He's a sore loser though as he drags his feet over to the cabinets in search for the baby food jars.

"Top cabinet to the left," Shadow informs, not taking his eyes off the sketches in front of him.

Sonic turns to the cabinet instructed for him to open and cautiously glances back over at Shadow. He feels kind of weird having him look at the sketches. Especially when the dark hero's face is unflinching, hyper focused, and expressionless as he flips through them. He grabs what he's looking for and pulls up a chair in front of the hungry baby, trying to concentrate on the task instead of his designs being judged.

Shadow flips the last page and makes sure there isn't anything on the other side before flipping back to the beginning, "They're drastically different from what you'd normally wear."

“That’s...” Sonic starts as he swallows roughly, “That’s because they’re not...for me.”

Shadow shoots him a confused look before his eyes settle on Silver. He glances at the baby’s inhibitors before letting his eyes fall onto the pages again. Silver’s inhibitors are drawn at the tops of the designs. It finally clicks with him and his head perks up, “They’re Silver’s.”

“Like I said, they’re just scribbles,” Sonic reiterates as he spoon feeds the happy baby, “And like... they aren’t even thought out or anything. I’ll need to talk to my bro about them more and... I dunno? I just couldn’t fall back to sleep last night. It’s kinda just mindless lines on paper.”

“I disagree,” Shadow states thoughtfully as he continues to skim through them, “Although, I see one flaw with this.”

“Dude! I just said they’re scribbles! They’re not gunna be perfect,” Sonic retaliates defensively.

Shadow shakes his head, “Not what I meant.” He walks back over to Sonic and places the pad of paper down next to him on the table, “The issue is that Silver isn’t done growing. It’d be pretty asinine to make shoes for him when he’s this young.”

Sonic looks away nervously and scratches the back of his neck, “Oh, uh... Guess I didn’t think of it like that.”

“Your heart was in the right place,” Shadow points out as he places a kiss to the blue hero’s temple, “Perhaps it’s best we prepare for his future in this regard. Although, might I suggest focusing less on flexibility and more on stability. I’d prefer it if Silver isn’t an offensive fighter like us. If I’m honest with myself, I’d prefer it if he weren’t a fighter at all.”

“Oh,” Sonic taps his chin thoughtfully as he takes in Shadow’s words, “So, like... You want them to be mainly for protection.”

“Exactly,” Shadow confirms.

Sonic turns to him with a wink, “I’ve got your number, Shads.”

Shadow blinks a few times, “I’d... hope so.”

Sonic bursts into laughter. He laughs louder when he sees Silver giggling with him. “See? Even Silvy thinks you’re funny,” Sonic points out.

Shadow doesn’t understand where the joke lies, but as long as the two of them are happy he’s at ease. He turns Sonic’s head just enough to kiss him on the lips and then ruffles the spikes on Silver’s head before walking back to the bedroom to get ready for his day.

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When Shadow gets to work, he already misses being at home. He opens his locker to the picture of Sonic on the door and runs a finger down it. Everything happened so fast. A few weeks ago Silver entered his life. A couple weeks ago, he wasn’t talking to Sonic. Now, he’s in a new house living with the blue hero. He sighs sadly, but stiffens when he feels Rouge sliding up next to him.

“Oh. So, you never took the picture down from your locker,” she states with a smirk.

“I... No, I just put it back up,” Shadow shuts the locker suddenly and looks away stubbornly.

“Mhm,” she nods, but doesn’t look convinced. “It’s nice to see that you’re back,” Rouge says like

she truly means it. She floats over to her own locker and assembles her makeup kits in an organized fashion. “Your replacement was a total bore,” she explains as she applies her mascara with the aid of the small mirror hung up in her locker.

“I can only imagine,” he grimaces, “He didn’t boss you around too much?”

“Oh, she was bossy alright,” Rouge replies with a look of dread as she flutters her eyelashes a bit and makes sure the coat is even, “I put her in her place though.”

“I’m sure you did,” Shadow responds, feeling his lips threatening a smile, “She must have really gotten under your skin.”

“All talk that one. She thinks she’s a hotshot and going to take over the commander’s position one day,” she announces with a laugh, “I’d like to see her try.”

“Rouge.”

Rouge’s eyes widen when she hears her name and she rolls them when she turns around. She folds her arms across her chest, “Topaz.”

It’s a woman in a swat uniform and she doesn’t look happy with Rouge. She turns to Shadow and gives him an apologetic look, “Sorry. I must not have gotten the memo of your return.”

Shadow just waves her off, “It’s fine.”

She turns her attention back to Rouge, “The commander wants to see you in his office, agent Rouge.”

Rouge places her hands on her hips and glares up at her, “If this is about pick locking your locker and rearranging it you should thank me. That thing was a sty.”

“You... *What!?*” Topaz runs off, presumably to check her locker.

Shadow glances over at Rouge and gives her a stale look, “You chose her from the roster of names.”

“Trust me,” Rouge says with a huff, “That’s one gem I don’t want anything to do with. I’ll do my research next time this happens.” She takes her time putting her makeup on before leaving to meet with the commander.

Shadow makes sure Omega is booted up and all of his systems are online before they head into the meeting room. It’s fifteen minutes later when Rouge joins them by their side looking frazzled as ever. She huffs and doesn’t look the commander in the eye the entire time their being briefed.

They go about their day as usual, but Shadow doesn’t bother her about it until later. He knows how Rouge can be. Besides, he kind of likes the all business no play version of her today. It not only makes his job easier, but it’s pretty amusing. Not one asshole attempts to talk down to any of them.

When the day is over, she yanks her locker open and Shadow’s pretty sure the hinges are loose now. “Can you believe her? Reporting me like that,” Rouge complains loudly as if she wants everyone to hear, “The nerve of that woman!”

“What did you do?” Shadow asks, almost feeling bad for her.

“Nothing I wouldn’t tease you for,” Rouge replies with her lip pouted out.

Shadow sighs and glances back at her, “You do realize I’m lenient with you because you’re like a

sister to me and I love you, right? Any other person would get offended by the stunts you pull.”

“Yeah, well,” Rouge glares back at him, “If she’s going to be standing in for someone like you she better suck it up.”

“And what exactly does that mean,” Shadow asks, not sure he wants to know.

“You actually pull your weight, you hold your own,” Rouge stops and sees Topaz walk past her and she adds loudly, “and you don’t need to be saved every five minutes!”

Topaz gives her an ugly look and put her nose in the air as she walks out of the locker room.

Shadow smacks his face with his palm and lets it slide down like he’s so done with this. He folds his arms across his chest and turns to her with a stern look, “I understand your anger. Trust me. There are plenty of people who have it out for me as well, but you need to remain professional while you’re on the clock.”

Rouge curls her lip into a snarl and slams her locker closed, “Yeah, I got it! I was already lectured about that today! But thank you for bringing it to my attention again!”

Shadow blinks at her like he’s confused. He’s never really seen this response from her. At least not at work. He places a hand on her shoulder and frowns at her, “I apologize. That was insensitive of me.”

Rouge looks like she’s genuinely surprised that Shadow is being so open with her right now. She rubs at the corner of her eye like she’s fixing her makeup, but she’s clearly brushing a tear away. “Do you think we can get out of here for a bit?” She asks with a frown, “I know you’re busy with your own obligations and a family and…”

“Hey,” Shadow stops her and looks her in the eye with all seriousness, “You’re part of my family too.” He guides her out of the locker room and down the halls. When they exit the building she seems a bit more relieved and that makes him frown. “If it’s because I put more stress on you from taking time off,” Shadow starts to say.

Rouge shakes her head, “No, that’s not it. I’m not even mad about that. I’m taking my anger out on it.”

They walk over to the parking garage and Shadow offers the bike as a seat for Rouge. She takes it gladly and sits down with her legs crossed. She leans her elbow against the dash and rests her fist to her cheek, “I guess I’m just a little jealous of the normal life you and blue have.”

“Normal?” Shadow asks with a laugh, “That’s absurd.”

Rouge lets out a long sigh, “I know, right? It’s bizarre.” She glances out at their co-workers getting into their vehicles and leaving. “I guess I couldn’t picture you actually settling down with anyone and buying a house and having a kid,” Rouge explains as her voice gets quieter, “It feels like just yesterday that you didn’t have a place to stay and you were living with me. Neither of us having our lives figured out and it not mattering because we were living.”

“This all fell on me rather quickly. If you told me I’d be where I am a month back I’d probably accuse you of lying,” Shadow states with a frown, “Although, you’re still young. Hell, I’m young. All of this happened a bit earlier than I’d anticipate it to.”

“But the thought was in your mind,” Rouge asks with a slight smirk.

Shadow looks away with a slight blush creeping up his face, “I uh…” He clears his throat and stands



up taller, “I wasn’t going to push anything on him. Our relationship is a bit unconventional as is. So, I left it open. If something like that never transpired, that would be fine as well.”

Rouge’s eyes are glassy by the end of Shadow’s explanation. She leans back against the bike and mimics one of those overdramatic actresses on a fainting couch. “Why can’t Knuckles be more like you,” she asks with her hand over her heart. Her eyes open wide and she sits up with a start, “That means blue proposed!”

Shadow nods and feels the blush on his face in full bloom, “Y-yes, he did.” He hardens his stance though and gives her a stern look, “What happened with the echidna?”

“Nothing,” she rolls her eyes, “That’s the problem.”

He squints at her like he doesn’t understand.

“Don’t get me wrong. I know I’m still young, but our lives just... clash,” she explains sadly, “You know me. You know my schedule. I like to keep busy. I work the nightclub at nights as a social thing for fun. None of that matters though. I’m not giving up my lifestyle and neither is he. He has his mystical destiny with that emerald. When anything goes wrong with it he disappears with it to that island. I almost miss the days when I’d steal it just to get some attention from him.”

“I suppose,” Shadow says a bit unsure, “compromise is needed.”

“We have none of that,” Rouge replies with a laugh, “I can quit the club anytime I want. I own the place. It’s this job. I can’t just go run off to an island whenever I please for weeks on end. I can’t have someone who does that to me either.”

“Perhaps you need to find someone to better suit your needs,” Shadow suggests.

Rouge leans against the handlebars of the bike and drapes her arms across them. She’s silent for a long while as she thinks it over. When she finally speaks, it’s one of the saddest tones he’s ever heard from her, “I don’t know, Shadow? I feel like that’s the direction it’s headed to, but I’m too afraid to admit it. I want this to work so badly. I also don’t want to think about it because it makes me so miserable.” She gets up and places her hand on Shadow’s head, ruffling his quills a bit. “I know you and blue had your rough patch, but when I saw the look in his eyes... I could just feel it. You two were made for each other. It’s so sweet it’s disgusting,” she begins to walk away as her heels echo with each step.

Shadow looks away and feels bad for even suggesting that now. He knows he still harbors some dormant bitter feelings for Knuckles, but he also hates seeing Rouge like this. He turns sharply and holds his hand out for her, “Wait! You can come with us. We’re meeting with him tonight.”

She lifts her hand up to wave him off, not even looking back. “I’ll pass,” she responds with a dismissive tone, “I’m sure he wouldn’t want me there with all this madness happening. Besides, I have a perfectly aged bottle of wine waiting for me at home. Ciao.”

Shadow lets his hand fall, but knows not to push any further. He just wishes he could have done more, but it seemed like there really wasn’t much to do in this case. So, he gets on his bike and starts it up. He almost reaches over to the compartment where his emerald would normally be and groans distastefully, “Right. No Chaos Emerald...” He checks the time and grimaces. It’s rush hour and it’s going to take forever to get home. He wants to just run home, but he doesn’t want to leave his bike here. So, he just heads out and hopes for the best.

## Premonition of the Master Emerald



### Chapter Eight: Premonition of the Master Emerald

Shadow finally, finally gets home. Traffic was just as bad as he expected. If not worse. He may or may not have weaved through cars illegally here and there just to keep his sanity. He parks his motorcycle in the driveway, not having it in him to actually open the garage and walks in the front door. He has a pounding headache and just wants to get this nonsense with Knuckles over with.

“Sonic, get ready,” Shadow calls out to him, tossing his keys on the counter.

“Shadow!?” Sonic peeks his head out from the hallway and his face lights up when he sees him, “Okay. Okay. Just... Just wait right there. Stay there. I’ll be right back.” His face disappears immediately after.

Shadow leans against the counter and holds his head, “Please, I don’t have time for games today.”

It’s only a moment later when Sonic zips back out and poses for him, sporting a baby carrier strapped around his shoulders with Silver riding in front. He spins around once to give Shadow a full 360 view before winking his way. “Amy took me shopping today,” Sonic announces, “Check it! I can totally use both my hands while doing stuff and run with no problem!”

Shadow looks shocked out of his mind. Not because of what’s presented in front of him, but by the fact Sonic went out with Amy willingly. “Amy,” Shadow says slowly to make sure he heard that right, “As in Miss Rose?”

Sonic pouts and taps his foot, “Yeah? So?”

Shadow shakes his head and gives him an amused look, "I'm just surprised is all."

Sonic sticks his tongue out at him. He stops and jumps up excitedly, "Oh, wait! You have to see what we bought!" He rushes over to the plastic play gym set up on the ground. He picks up Silver and places him down on the small mat. He wags his finger for Shadow to come over. "We have the coolest baby in the world," Sonic tells him as he watches Silver with wide eyes.

Shadow sighs and makes his way over. He sits down on the ground next to Sonic and goes to open his mouth, "Sonic, we really need to—"

Sonic places a finger against Shadow's lips and gestures to Silver, "Just watch."

Silver gives the little dangling toys in front of him a determined look. He makes grabby hands before reaching for them. They're various different plastic shaped instruments that make noises when he touches them. He squeals happily at the sounds and keeps grasping at them excitedly.

Sonic leans over to Shadow and whispers to him, "He's gunna be a musician. I can tell."

Shadow creases his brow and tries to fight the smile that crosses his face. They really needed to go, but this was pretty entertaining. He's also quite pleased with how well the two are getting along now and how accepting Sonic has become with all of this. He knows he was having a pretty bad day and he knows it's not over, but this little moment in time was really the highlight of his day.

Shadow rests his hand on Sonic's hip and pulls him in closer, resting his head on top of the hero's as he watches Silver play like he doesn't have a care in the world. He lets Silver finish his little concert before he makes them get ready.

They run all the way to Mystic Ruins to Tails' workshop and Silver is kicking his feet in the harness the whole time like he's itching to run with them. He's having the time of his life as the wind whips across his face. Sonic is shooting Shadow 'ooh' and 'aw' faces the whole time. He probably informs Shadow that they have the coolest baby about a dozen times on the way there too. Each time Shadow has to nod and agree with him, attempting to be aloof about it.

When they get to Tails', Sonic bursts through the door and barrels his way in. Shadow politely walks in after and addresses the fox who is sitting at the counter reading a book. Sonic slides the pad of paper with his designs in front of what he's reading and gives him big glassy eyes.

"What's this?" Tails asks as he places the book down and takes it, "Also, I was expecting you guys two hours ago. It's going to be sunset soon."

"I know how to fly rain or shine," Sonic boasts proudly.

"Yeah, but it'll probably be easier to figure out what's going on with the Master Emerald in full visibility," Tails points out. His eyes skim over the designs and his eyebrows shoot up, "Oh my gosh! You're designing shoes again!?" Tails gets up suddenly as the stool falls over and he goes to grab his graph paper excitedly. "It's been so long," he exclaims with a wide smile on his face, "You're the same shoe size, right?"

"Uh..." Sonic rubs his finger underneath his nose out of nervous habit, "They're for the baby."

Tails' head lifts from the paper slowly and glances up at the child in the harness. He glances back down at the paper again and nods a few times, "Yeah... Yeah... That should work."

"But like... maybe hold off on making them until later. Shadow wants him to grow a little first," Sonic explains with a sheepish look, "And uh... maybe make them 'safer.'"

“Safer?” Tails asks like he’s not sure what he means.

“Protective footwear,” Shadow clarifies, “For defensive combat.”

“Oh,” Tails nods like he gets it. He spins the graph paper around so it’s vertical and immediately starts sketching a framework. It’s only a minute or two before he lifts the paper up for them to see. “Might I suggest a steel toe boot then,” Tails advises.

Shadow smirks like he’s impressed and Sonic grabs the paper in awe.

“This changes everything,” Sonic says with a huge smile on his face. He makes his way over to Tails and places the paper back down. He snatches a pencil and their exchange is adorable. Sonic is pointing out different styles and fabrics and Tails is suggesting materials for the soles and a way for the rings to connect smoothly to the tops.

Although, when it gets to the topic of color, they’re cooperative nature turns pretty sour.

“Dude! They *have* to be red! My shoes are red. Shadow’s shoes are red. Silver’s have to be red to match,” Sonic shouts with irritation, “We’re Team Sonic!”

Tails sighs and taps his pencil on the counter with exasperation, “Sonic, red isn’t going to look good. Look at his color scheme. I’m thinking maybe a soft teal or a turquoise. Or maybe something on the blue end of the color spectrum.” Tails also adds under his breath, “I’m sure he’ll thank me when he gets older too.”

Sonic scrunches his nose at him, “What is with you and blues?”

“Rock, paper, scissor for it?” Tails asks, holding his hands out ready to throw down.

Sonic gives him a confident smirk, “You’re on!”

Shadow glances down at Tails’ sly look and holds his hand out for Sonic, “Wai--!”

Before Shadow can utter anything, the two are already shouting ‘rock, paper, scissors, shoot.’ Shadow just sighs and shakes his head before even seeing Sonic choose rock and lose.

Sonic throws his hands up in the air, “Ugh! What!?” He gets ready for a second round, “Best two out of three!”

Tails shakes his head, “Nope. I won fair and square.”

“No way! You have this look on your face,” Sonic starts to say as Tails sends him a sly look again, “Yeah! *That one!* You did something. You rigged it!”

Tails draws imaginary circles on the counter as he explains, “All I did was calculate the ratio of what you would choose. 9 times out of 10 you’ll choose rock given my observation of your choices in the past. There’s an off chance you’ll choose scissors to throw me off, but the likelihood of you choosing that first is slim to none.”

“That’s cheating, Tails,” Sonic interjects with a heated look.

“No, it’s not. I didn’t influence your choice in any way,” Tails points out, “So, it’s completely fair.”

“Shadow,” Sonic says desperately with big, watery eyes.

Shadow groans and turns away with a huff, “I tried to warn you before you agreed, but as usual you

made your decision without thinking.”

“Fine,” Sonic shouts childishly and pulls Silver out of his harness before putting him in Tails’ lap, “It’s not like it’s my kid or anything! I don’t get a say!” He stomps away and slams his bedroom door shut.

Tails shakes his head, “He’s such a brat sometimes.”

Shadow knows Sonic is in the wrong. He knows he walked into that without thinking. He knows Tails won that fairly. But something in his chest pangs and he’s trying to ignore it. He glances at the closed door and slowly walks over to the fox before whispering, “Put a little bit of red on it.”

Tails looks up at Shadow like he’s surprised at him. It quickly melts into a smirk though, “You’re spoiling him, you know that?”

“I’m *painfully* aware of that, Miles,” Shadow grits out a bit roughly.

“Yeesh. Busting out the first name. I must have hit a nerve,” Tails states while cringing. He glances over at the paper, eying it thoughtfully. He holds his fist out to Shadow, “Rock, paper, scissors for it?”

Shadow glances down at Tails’ fist and then back up at him. He doesn’t know why he’s getting himself involved in such a trivial thing, but he reluctantly agrees.

*“Rock, Paper, Scissors, Shoot!”*

Tails looks down at the outcome like he’s surprised. He completely misread Shadow. He thought he’d throw down paper for sure because of Sonic’s last choice. Instead, Shadow chose rock.

Tails gives Shadow a sheepish look, “Looks like you won. I didn’t expect that at all. I was sure you’d pick paper.”

“You’re correct. My initial reaction was to do so,” Shadow states, “You read me clearly.”

Tails just gives Shadow a look like he doesn’t understand.

“Sonic is spontaneous. His choices are unpredictable through my lens. Each path I choose is something I carefully calculate, but even when I choose the most logical path it comes with dire consequences,” Shadow explains with a focused look, “but Sonic creates branching paths I’d never even consider. As if constantly carving and creating his own way. When I follow it, unpredictable possibilities present themselves to me. They are high risk and would normally result in failure, but for some reason... they’re the correct routes.”

Tails looks like he’s speechless.

“So, I chose rock because he did,” Shadow concludes as he looks down at his hand, “because his way is the correct way.”

“That’s deep,” Tails replies like even he is trying to wrap his mind around it. Regardless, he lost. Fair and square. He finally turns to Shadow with a defeated look and says, “I’ll see what I can do.”

“It’s very much appreciated,” Shadow nods to him before making his way over to the closed door that leads to Sonic’s old bedroom. He knocks gently on the wood and murmurs, “Sonic, may I come in?”

There's movement from the other end and Sonic slides the door open, one eye peeking out. He slips through the door and closes it behind him. "No, we should probably get going," the blue hero tells him.

Shadow nods and doesn't argue. He takes Sonic's hand and lets him guide him out into the garage area. Tails had set up the red plane in advance for them and Shadow observes how Sonic takes it in for a moment before climbing on. Sonic offers his hand to him and Shadow takes it, pulling himself up.

He glances down at the singular seat and raises an eyebrow, "This plane seats only one person."

Sonic climbs inside the cockpit and lets a smirk grace his lips, "Whaddya mean, Shads?"

"Don't play games with me," Shadow states as he stares down at Sonic.

"You have two choices: you can ride on the tail for more secure footing," Sonic explains as he leans back as his arms pillow his head, "Or you can be *daring* and ride on the wing."

"That sounds like a challenge," Shadow stands up tall and folds his arms across his chest.

Sonic looks away with an innocent look like he doesn't know what he's talking about.

Tails is standing in the doorway that leads from his workshop with the baby in his arms and gives them a stale look, "Are you two going to actually leave or are you going to keep flirting with one another for another two hours? Because you're already kinda behind schedule."

Shadow hops up onto the wing and gets into a crouched stance as one hand feels the metal under his fingertips. It gives him an almost nostalgic feeling of the ARK's floors. He glances at Sonic from over his shoulder and whispers to him, "We should probably go before your brother refuses to help us in the future."

Sonic takes his sweet time, arm hanging out of the plane as he stares up at Shadow, "Just taking in the view first."

Shadow twists around and his face is threatening a blush when he hears a whistle, "Would you focus?"

"I am," Sonic snickers. When he sees Shadow's scowl, he holds his hands up in defeat. "Okay. Okay. We're going," he says as he starts the plane up.

They wave their good-byes before jetting off.

Sonic is a bit more of a bold flyer than Tails is, but he doesn't go too crazy because he knows this is Shadow's first time in the sky. At least, like this anyway.

Shadow remains in his crouched position for a good while. He keeps glancing up at the sky because the stars are so bright. He hasn't seen them this clearly since he's gotten to Earth. There really was a difference without all of the city's light pollution.

"Hey, Shads," Sonic calls up to him over the engine.

Shadow turns his attention back to the blue hero to indicate that he's listening.

"Close your eyes."

Shadow does as he's told. He can feel the wind against his face and the plane ascending higher into

the air. He almost doesn't feel the metal under his feet anymore. He's more immersed in this feeling. One he's refused to partake in for various reasons. Although, there is something freeing about it. He can see why Sonic likes it so much.

"Okay! Open them," Sonic shouts out to him.

Shadow seems confused. He thought he was instructed to close his eyes to enjoy the ride. When he opens his eyes though he's floored. He doesn't even realize that he isn't crouched anymore, but standing up straight as he takes in the view.

They were flying over the clouds and there's nothing, but endless sky and stars overhead. It's like he's brought back in time, looking down at the stars. Except there isn't a glass barrier between him. It's right there in the open for him to see.

"It's been here this whole time," Shadow murmurs softly.

He isn't sure if Sonic heard him, but the blue hero is shouting back to him, "See, Shadow? The same sky! We *were* connected. It's just that you were looking down at it and I was looking up!"

"Yes," Shadow agrees as a calm smile graces his face. He lets it fall when he looks back down at Sonic, "I've never had the urge to go back to the ARK. Not after everything that has happened. Although... there is one sight I do miss."

"Yeah? What's that?" Sonic asks with a smirk.

"Witnessing the soft glow of the Earth," Shadow responds with a tranquil look, "Don't mistake my words. I want to live on this planet, but seeing it from afar..."

"Nothing like it, huh?" Sonic replies with a laugh.

Shadow locks eyes with Sonic for a moment before turning away. "That's not true," he disagrees, "There's one thing that's far better." Shadow doesn't even have to look back to know Sonic is blushing. His silence says it all. Shadow rests his hands to his hips and takes in a deep breath of fresh air. He had to admit there was something very magical about being up here.

"Ya know, I was thinking... ever since you told me about time being nonlinear," Sonic starts to say as they continue on, "and with Blaze and Silver coming from the future... That changes the future, right?"

Shadow crouches back down and takes a seat on the metal wing, but he doesn't take his eyes off the sky, "It doesn't much change the future. Rather, it opens up new pathways that would not be reached otherwise. Silver's world will still exist and it will always be destroyed, but since he's here now it will open up new possibilities and reveal new choices."

"There's still a chance his timeline will link with ours though, right?" Sonic asks with a frown.

"Yes, that is a possibility and a path that is already open," Shadow nods as he leans back on his elbows, "Although, that requires us choosing not to act even after what we're told and I will not let that happen. The future is a gamble. It's a 50/50 shot that we make the wrong choices."

"Geez, way to put pressure on me," Sonic says with a nervous laugh.

"Do not worry yourself with that pressure," Shadow tells him with a serious look, "Let me figure that out. Go on as you are with your own instincts. The future will fall into place naturally."

“You seem to know a lot about this stuff,” Sonic states with a smile, “Is it something you learned on the ARK?”

Shadow is silent for a moment as if trying to figure out how to answer. After awhile he just shrugs and explains, “This way of thinking must have just been something that was programmed into me during my creation. Although, when my mind was tampered with, I was unable to compare the choices I’ve made in the past making it was harder to see the possibilities of the future. In a lot of aspects history does repeat itself and it creates patterns that make it easier to read proper outcomes. Without that context though, without a pattern to go by... it’s difficult to discover that outcome.”

“Wow,” Sonic replies with a snicker, “Not sure I can say I can relate, but... I can see why you say you don’t live in the present.”

“I’m getting better at it,” Shadow states with a nod, “Meeting you, making friends, and starting a family has grounded me a lot. More likely than not, the future has fallen into place without much effort.”

“Yeah?” Sonic asks as he looks up at Shadow expectantly, “Is it because you got all of your memories back?”

“That’s helped,” Shadow responds, “Putting my trust in you has also been a key factor.”

Sonic scratches his nose nervously and feels his face heating up from Shadow’s words.

It’s a bit of a ride, but the silence between them is comfortable. Nothing more needs to be said besides just enjoying each other’s presence. Shadow doesn’t look down at Sonic, but can feel the other’s eyes on him every once in awhile. It soothes him a bit. Especially since he can’t fathom anyone taking their eyes off the scenery around them.

The silhouette of the floating island comes into view and Shadow has to squint his eyes to see it against the backdrop of the dark sky. The only reason why he could see it at all was from the absence of stars. He doesn’t say anything, just gazes upon it. He doesn’t really know what to expect either. He’s never been to Angel Island. Just heard the hero speak of it.

There’s a slight pulse that rumbles through the air and the plane shifts a bit. Shadow crouches down and holds onto the side of the wing. He turns to Sonic and asks, “What was that?”

“Just a bit of turbulence,” Sonic replies with a smirk, “If you’re scared, you can come down here and hold my hand.”

Shadow glares down at him, “Not necessary.” He has nothing against holding Sonic’s hand, but the implication he was scared from such a minor hiccup was insulting. Just as he thinks that though, there’s another pulse and Shadow feels himself stiffening up.

Sonic glances around like he’s confused. He licks his finger and raises it up in the air. The wind wasn’t against them at all. If anything, they’re riding with it. He’s not sure what’s causing the turbulence. It was a beautiful, clear night.

Another wave hits and the plane jerks back. Shadow’s hold on the wing tightens and he feels his heartbeat quicken a bit. Okay, maybe he was a little scared. Only because he doesn’t have his emerald on hand. Otherwise, he’d be fine with this.

“Hey, maybe you should come down now,” Sonic suggests.

“It’s fine,” Shadow tells him stubbornly.



Sonic sighs and just nods his head. He keeps a steady hand on the controls to keep the plane as balanced as possible. He can handle this no problem, but it's just strange given the circumstances. He has a bad feeling the source is coming from Angel Island and these pulses are going to become stronger and more regular.

For a moment, it seems like Sonic is wrong and that's what he was hoping for, but luck isn't in his favor. A larger burst jerks the plane back and it's the strongest one yet. He keeps a firm grip on the wheel and winces a bit.

Shadow's hold slips a bit and when he goes to readjust his stance, another wave hits and he's thrown off the wing. His shoes ignite to life and he lands a bit roughly on the tail of the plane. He holds onto Sonic's seat and ignores the pain from where his back hit the back end of the plane.

"You okay?" Sonic asks as he turns his body around to him.

"Just focus," Shadow states a bit roughly from his nerves being rattled.

Sonic reluctantly agrees and shouts out to him, "Just hold on. I'm gunna see if I can get a little higher. It might be easier to ride the currents."

Shadow stays put and mostly tries to understand why Sonic is okay with flying and not swimming. He feels like he'd have a greater chance of dying falling from this height than drowning. They may not age and they may be immortal, but these kinds of things can still kill them.

The plane rises in the air and Shadow holds on. The island is getting closer and closer into view. He can see a brilliant green hue coming from it and he's a bit captivated by it. He feels the turbulence again, but it's under them and not as strong. If anything, it raises them up higher.

"So, you *do* know what you're doing," Shadow teases a bit, feeling his muscles loosen.

"Of course I do," Sonic replies confidently, "If you're still scared though you can hold my hand. The offer still stands."

Shadow chuckles under his breath. He sees Sonic raise a hand from the wheel and he goes to grab it. A burst of energy takes them both by surprise though and the plane jerks.

Sonic steadies the plane and grits his teeth. He sighs when it evens out again. "Woo! That was a close one," Sonic announces with relief, "Right Shadow?" When he doesn't get a response, he turns his body around and gasps. There was no sighs of the ebony hero. Sonic cranks the yoke and pulls the plane around. He eyes dart back and forth until he sees the streak of yellow sailing downward. He's so glad Shadow has his hover shoes otherwise he'd never be able to spot him.

Sonic twists the lever that causes the plane to boost forward and the thrusters go into overdrive. He angles the plane on its side and nosedives alongside Shadow. He reaches his hand out and he sees Shadow reaching his hand out for him back. Their fingers touch for a brief moment, but another pulse sends them backwards.

Sonic groans, feeling the plane losing its balance again. He twists the plane upside down and upright again, lining up with Shadow once more. Sonic pulls his seatbelt off and braces his foot onto the controls. He carefully edges closer and closer to Shadow. Shadow's reaching his hand out for him and Sonic does the same. His foot steers him in closer still until he sees the opening. He dangles his body out of the cockpit, takes Shadow firmly by the wrist and pulls him in.

They pile into the cockpit with Shadow in his lap and Sonic takes the controls again. He pulls up and his heart stutters in his chest when the plane is headed closer and closer for the water. His fingers

press a few buttons and tries again, pulling the wheel with all of his might. He doesn't want to crash in the water. Anywhere but there.

Finally the plane gets the lift it needs and the bottom just grazes the surface of the water and their up in the air again, shooting up into the sky at high speeds. "Yeah!" Sonic shouts out into the night, "That's what I'm talkin' about!!!"

Shadow is holding onto Sonic's neck and glaring at him, "You're insane, you know that!?"

Sonic just winks his way and smirks, "If you wanted to hold my hand all you had to do was ask."

Shadow looks like he's going to smack him in the face, but instead pulls him into a tight hug and whispers, "Thank you."

Sonic's expression softens a bit and he wraps one arm around Shadow to hug him back.

Shadow squeezes his hand on Sonic's shoulder and grits his teeth. He needs his emerald back. It's slowly dawning on him that if something were to happen to either of them, he'd be at a disadvantage. It's more than just a convenience. It's crucial to keeping Sonic safe.

"I've gotcha," Sonic whispers to him, "Don't worry."

Don't worry. That's easy for him to say. Shadow wonders just how much he does to keep them safe behind the scenes. He knows Sonic has an idea, but still. He finally has a good life now and these three years have been his happiest yet. He doesn't want all of that to go away. He won't let it.

The plane finally lands on the island and Sonic locks the breaks in place. It's a lot windier on the island and there's a storm cloud looming above the Master Emerald. Sonic can't shake the feeling of déjà vu. Regardless, he hops out of the plane and helps Shadow down. Sonic rushes ahead when he sees Knuckles.

"Yo, Knux!" Sonic calls out.

Knuckles is holding his hands up and his eyes are closed in a concentrated look. He opens them up when he hears the blue hero's voice, "This is one of those rare times where I'm glad to see you." Knuckles glances out behind Sonic and lowers his brow, "What is he doing here?"

"I dunno, Knux. You kinda stole the guy's emerald. Isn't that more of Rouge's MO?" Sonic jokes with him.

Shadow sends a sharp look at Knuckles and states, "You don't give Rouge enough credit. She wouldn't steal from me without good reason."

Knuckles goes to open his mouth, but the emerald pulses once more and sends the three heroes back a bit. The echidna turns back to the Master Emerald and gives it a concerned look, "I could sense it. The Master Emerald was begging for the Chaos Emeralds. When I set the last one onto the altar though, the Chaos Emeralds pushed me back and created a barrier as if to protect it. Now, the Master Emerald is slowly cracking and water is pouring out from it. I don't know what to make of it, but I can't get close enough to calm Chaos down."

"Hmph," Shadow sneers at him, "It's almost as if gathering the Chaos Emeralds in one place made the situation worse."

Knuckles gets in Shadow's face and shouts, "What did you say!?"

Sonic gets between the two and gives them a sheepish look, “Easy. Everyone chill. Getting all worked up about it isn’t gunna solve anything.”

“How can you act so calm right now!?” Knuckles states angrily, “Chaos is threatening to emerge and shatter the Master Emerald! The last time this happened he almost destroyed the world!”

“Yeah, but freaking out and attacking each other isn’t gunna help,” Sonic replies with a frown.

“Why didn’t you come here with Tails? Why come here with Mr. Doom and Gloom,” Knuckles asks.

“Call me that again, echidna,” Shadow warns with heat to his voice, “and I will make sure they’re the last words you ever utter.”

Sonic cringes and pulls Knuckles in by the shoulder. He leans over and whispers to him, “Probably not cool to call Shadow any nickname that has the word ‘Doom’ in it. Kinda a sore spot for him.”

Knuckles pushes him back, “I don’t have time for this! Either help me or leave!”

Shadow braces Sonic so he doesn’t fall and he marches over to Knuckles, “Perhaps you should practice some humility while asking for help.”

“You’re one to talk,” Knuckles snarls back.

“Uh... Guys?” Sonic says a bit warily.

Shadow turns back to Sonic and follows his eyes down. The water that is streaming down the steps of the alter is gathering around Shadow’s feet as if magnetized to him. Shadow steps away from the puddle, yet the puddle follows him. Rippling and trickling around his feet. He glances back at Sonic and questions, “Is this unusual?”

Sonic looks a bit awed when he nods, “Very.”

Shadow turns back to Knuckles and asks, “You said the barrier will not let you through?”

Knuckles looks away a bit embarrassed and answers, “Yeah.”

“Wait here,” Shadow tells them.

“Wh-what!?” Knuckles stomps his foot, “You better keep your grubby paws off my emerald!”

Shadow disregards Knuckles’ words and walks forward. He follows the stream of water up until he gets to the barrier. The emerald pulses out an incredible amount of energy and Shadow braces himself. He closes his eyes and hears sobbing. It sounds eerily similar to Sonic’s, but when he looks back he notices that Sonic is standing in the same spot he was in, giving Shadow a thumbs up. Shadow returns his attention back on the barrier and places his hand upon it. Except there’s no resistance. It’s almost like it does not exist aside from its visual form. Shadow passes through it as easily as he would light and continues up the steps. The water is much thicker as it flows around his ankles.

He reaches the top step and sees that the Master Emerald is in fact spouting out water, like a glass wall trying to hold back water pressure. The cracks spread more and more and the thing looks as though it could shatter at any moment. He glances up at the pillars and spots his Chaos Emerald. He could take it and leave and be done with all of this. His only goal is to take back what was taken from him so he can protect his family.

“Are you there?” The crying voice asks from inside the emerald.

“I am,” Shadow says back.

He feels the water around his ankles rise and the waves lick back and forth.

“Please,” the voice begs, “Come closer. I want to feel your presence again.”

Shadow turns back to look at Sonic who is still standing at the base of the altar. It’s very odd that the voice in the emerald sounds just like Sonic’s. He walks over to the Master Emerald nonetheless and places a hand on it. He smooths his hand across one of the cracks and when he pulls his hand away, it’s as if it were repaired. “Are you the one they call Chaos?” Shadow questions.

“Do you not remember me?” The voice asks.

“I do not,” Shadow answers honestly, “Perhaps we’ve met before my earliest memories were formed.”

“We met before time existed,” the voice responds, “Before there was anything...it was just us.”

Shadow creases his brow and takes a step forward to look inside. He isn’t sure what he’s seeing is a figure or his own reflection. “Is that so?” He asks, trying to get a closer look.

The figure blinks and places a hand on the emerald as if they were trapped inside, “We exist in the past, present, and future.”

“Do you know of the future?” Shadow questions a bit more urgently, “Do you know of Mephiles?”

“I do,” the voice responds and the figure smiles back. It’s weird to see this expression on Sonic’s face. One that’s calm and sad and lonely.

“Tell me,” Shadow says as he places his hand up against the emerald where the figure’s is. He gasps when he sees the hand melt through and lace their fingers together. Before he can react, there’s a flash of white light and his surrounding fade to reds and oranges all around him. There’s fire everywhere and buildings are singed and destroyed.

A group of people run screaming for their lives. They trip over one another and other’s trample over them. Shadow rushes forward to go to help them, but his hand fades through them. He stops when he sees a blur of blue.

“Easy, easy,” standing before him is definitely Sonic, helping up the fallen civilians. He guides them out and points down the street, “There’s a safe house a few blocks down! Keep moving!”

The humans nod and rush out in the direction they’re instructed to go as they shout their thanks to him.

Sonic turns his attention back around and gives it a grim look.

Above, Blaze hovers down with the use of her flames and gazes out in the same direction as him, “The humans on the North side have all been properly evacuated, Your Majesty.”

“Same here,” Sonic responds to her. He turns to her and gives her a serious look, “He’s getting unstable again. I need you to absorb his flames long enough for me to get through and calm him down.”

She nods to him, “I will do my best.”

Sonic watches her jump off and he lets out an uneasy breath. He pulls out an inhibitor ring from his jacket pocket and fastens it around his wrist. Shadow remembers the model. It's his old one. The one Gerald had created for him. He wonders how Sonic even got a hold of that.

Shadow follows Sonic down the way, watching as the blue hero dodges around and through fire as Blaze physically maneuvers it around. Sonic lands in front of a clearing and Shadow is taken aback by the large beast in front of him.

It's a lava monster with horns jutting out from its head with three large green eyes. It seems to be protecting the Master Emerald much like a dragon would his treasure. Its large hands come crashing down on either side of Sonic and Shadow has to flinch when he sees it. Sonic stands sternly in place, in an unmoving stance. Shadow watches him in awe.

"Iblis!" Sonic shouts up to him with his arms held out, "You need to control yourself! Do not give into this rage!"

The beast lifts its head up into the air and bellows out an angry roar. Flames spout from its throat and volcanic rocks soar across the sky, crashing down on buildings and cars.

Still, Sonic doesn't move. Instead, he starts to chant, "The servers are the seven Chaos. Chaos is power. Power enriched by the heart. The controller is the one that unifies the Chaos."

Iblis cries out as if it's in pain as the emerald underneath it glows brightly. It slowly bows its head and rests its large chin against the asphalt street in front of Sonic with a whimper.

Sonic looks down at the inhibitor around his wrist with a forlorn look before lifting his hand to Iblis' head. "Please," Sonic whispers to him, "Give me your chaos energy. You don't need this much power. It's too much. You'll burn out."

Shadow observes the exchange. He doesn't quite understand. This thing was destroying everything it touched, yet Sonic was handling it with such gentleness and care.

Iblis closes its eyes and submits to Sonic's words. Its flames dull down at the touch of the inhibitor ring. Sonic places his other hand on the beast's head and closes his eyes. The energy surges inside his body and his quills lift and he glows a brilliant gold. His feet lift off the ground momentarily, but he gasps out and falters back.

Shadow moves forward as if to help, but he knows this is just a vision and there's nothing that can be done.

Sonic grips his chest and breathes unevenly as the gold flutters away from him. He pulls his hand away from his chest and flames swirl and fester around his heart. He falls to his knees and smiles weakly as he watches Iblis' form dissipate into ash against the wind.

Blaze drops down to the ground in front of Sonic and helps him back up, "You did it once again, Your Majesty."

Sonic coughs into his hand and looks down at the red droplets staining his gloves. He closes his palm quickly before Blaze can see, but Shadow eyes it in horror. Sonic dusts the fire away from his chest with the hand that has the inhibitor on it like it's a minor nuisance. He unclasps the ring and slips it back into his pocket. "I only managed to calm him. He'll be back," Sonic rasps out, trying to stand strong.

"That's all any of us ask of you," Blaze says as she bows to him, "We're very grateful for your valiancy. No one, not even I, can get close enough to Iblis to stop him."

Sonic disregards her statement and hands over a futuristic tracking device, “I found what I was looking for. There was a way to retrieve Doctor Ivory’s transmission. The bioweapon is located in the Mystic Ruins base. He must have transported it there after the incident. I need you to retrieve the Time Stones and meet me there.”

Blaze bows once more and takes the device from Sonic’s hand, “You can count on me, Your Majesty.” She takes her leave a moment later.

Sonic stands alone, looking out at the destruction around him. He closes his eyes and speaks out, “I know you’re here.”

Shadow takes a careful step forward, wondering if he can sense him. He lifts his hand up to touch him, but stops when he hears footsteps. His eyes widen when he sees the figure walking through the fire and its body coming into form. It definitely looked like a spitting image of himself. The figure walks closer and closer with slowly paced steps and it’s head hung on its shoulders. It stops just in front of Shadow and Shadow has to take a step back because it turns to him briefly.

The eyes are green and slitted. Bestial looking. Where Shadow’s stripes would be red, it’s were dull and blue-grey. The thing that’s really throwing him off though is that fact that it doesn’t have a mouth.

It turns its attention away from Shadow and continues its trek toward Sonic. It’s mouth doesn’t move, but it can speak by projecting its voice out with its mind and its voice is deep, rivaling his own but it’s almost humorous. “Why do you resist? It’s only a matter of time. Time you’re running short of. Iblis’ power will eat away at your heart. There’s something poetically romantic about that.”

“My choices are mine to make alone,” Sonic replies as he lowers his brow, “Go crawl back into the test tube you came out of, you mutated freak.”

Mephiles lifts his head up and lets out a laugh, “You’re one to talk. Just because you were set free instead of choosing to escape doesn’t make any difference.”

“I was created with a purpose,” Sonic retaliates, “You’re nothing, but a mistake.”

“Mistake,” Mephiles muses as he looks down at his hands, “In evolution...isn’t everything a mistake? Mutations occur naturally and the stronger species dominates. It’s time nature takes its course. A new era is beginning, Sonic the Hedgehog...and you’re about to go extinct. One more piece needs to fall in place. With Iblis... I’ll finally be complete.”

“You’ll never have him,” Sonic states sternly. He pulls out the green Chaos Emerald and uses Chaos Control to teleport.

The flash of green blinds Shadow momentarily and when his vision comes back into focus he can tell he’s standing in the Mystic Ruins. The trees have all dried up and died, their leaves long since gone, but the husks of what the trees used to be remain.

Sonic looks up at the base hidden away beneath the dried up brush and he pulls the dead vines and ivy away from it. A large metal door is unveiled and he lets out a sigh of relief. He doesn’t go inside. Rather, he waits for Blaze to return.

Sonic turns and leans his back against one of the creaking trees, staring down at his left hand. He bites the fabric of his glove and pulls it off, revealing the wedding band around his finger. He lifts it to his heart and winces as all of the emotions bubble up at once. He sobs into the quiet forest and whispers, “Please, Shadow... I can’t...” His legs wobble and buckle as his back slides down against

the rough bark of the tree. He coughs and hacks into his hand as more droplets of blood appear against his palm. He closes his hand into a fist and wipes the trickle of blood away from his lips. "I don't know how much longer I can keep Iblis at bay," Sonic admits out loud to himself as if wishing he were talking to Shadow, "If I had you... we could do this together. Your body was created to handle large bursts of energy like this." Sonic sighs and looks up at the stars. He lifts his hand up and whispers, "I know you're out there. Connected by the same sky. You can see me, can't you?" He laughs to himself and shakes his head, "Who am I kidding? At this point, the world could burn... I'm so selfish. I just want you here for me. If I died now in your arms... that would be enough."

Shadow can't even look at Sonic. His words are too much for him. Shadow promised he'd be there for Sonic no matter what. He promised he'd protect him. So, why is Sonic here alone like this?

"I am here, my king," Blaze's voice comes from the sky and she drops down onto the crumbling grass.

Sonic quickly slips his glove back on and gets to his feet. He dusts himself off and asks, "You brought the Time Stones?"

She reveals two hexagon shaped gems: one red and one green.

Sonic smiles down at them and locks eyes with her, "You did really well, Blaze. Thank you for helping me up until this point."

"Sir?" She asks like she doesn't understand.

He places a hand on her shoulder, "There's nothing more to salvage from this timeline. The flames chose you for a reason..."

"Come with me," Blaze demands.

Sonic shakes his head, "I can't. There is already a version of myself in that timeline."

She looks at him like she doesn't understand.

"You deserve better than this, Blaze. You deserve to live happy," Sonic tells her with a soft smile, "I have one final order for you."

"Anything, Your Majesty," Blaze replies with sad eyes.

"Use the Time Stones to travel back in time and deliver the bioweapon to me," Sonic says, sounding less like it's an order and more like it's an answer.

"What do I do then?" She asks a bit lost.

Sonic guides her to the large metallic door and replies, "That's for you to decide."

Just then, the sounds of trees collapsing and footsteps crunching against the dried up grass are heard. Mephiles seeps through the darkness and his emerald eyes practically glow against the colorless landscape around them. "You think you can escape me? I'm stronger and faster than you in every conceivable way," his dark voice booms through the forest.

"What is that?" Blaze asks with horror and disgust.

"I am Mephiles," he speaks, pausing for her to take it in, "Mephiles the Dark."

Sonic turns her toward the door and opens up a panel. A ray of light appears, scanning her body and

bleeps as it reached her forehead. The doors open as a robot voice chimes, "Access Granted." Sonic pushes her inside, but takes in a sharp breath.

"Your Majesty!!!" She cries out from inside the doorway.

The pain doesn't register right away. Sonic doesn't even realize what's happened until he feels warm blood trickle down his mouth. His eyes glance down at the fist puncturing his chest, holding the glowing green artifact, and a shaky hand goes to reach for the panel once more. He gives Blaze a sad smile before he presses the button, sealing the doors tight again.

Mephiles pulls his arms away from Sonic's body and lets it fall to the ground. He looks up and down the door before slamming his fist into it. It doesn't budge. He glances down at the control panel and scans the green gem. The panel blinks red and chimes, "Access Denied."

Sonic laughs weakly and uses all of the strength he has left to hold his head up, "You'll never have Iblis."

Mephiles turns to Sonic and holds the green gem in his hand. It slowly morphs into his body, merging with his heart. "Never say never," Mephiles says, "I have a lifetime."

In the distance, a large fiery tornado emerges as Iblis lets out an agonizing wail to the sky. It's flames shoot out across the land like bursts of untamed energy, consuming everything in its wake.

Mephiles' body morphs into a puddle of black liquid and just as the fire reaches them, it evaporates into dark smoke, floating away.

Nothing is left of the timeline, but white as Shadow looks down at Sonic laying before him. He kneels down and places a hand on the blue hero's cheek.

"There you are," Sonic whispers lightly.

Shadow smooths his hand down Sonic's face and hushes him.

Sonic shakily tries to reach his hand up, but it falls. He smiles when he feels Shadow catch it. "I'm so glad," Sonic murmurs to him, his voice hitching as tears roll down his face, "I knew you'd come back to me."

Shadow grits his teeth and does his best to hold back his own tears for Sonic's sake. "I'm here," Shadow whispers to him, "No harm will come to you anymore."

"I'm sorry," Sonic chokes out, "I should have done more."

"You've done more than enough," Shadow tells him as he wipes the tears that are rolling down Sonic's cheeks, "Now rest."

Sonic's breaths come out in short bursts before one last stream of air releases from his lips. The light in Sonic's eyes that Shadow's grown to love dims and the blue hero lays limp in his arms. Shadow pulls Sonic's body closer and presses his forehead against his heart. Only then does he start to let the tears flow freely.

When Shadow opens his eyes again, he's standing at the altar in front of the Master Emerald. The water has stopped flowing and the cracks are repaired, but the light is glowing like the beat of a heart. It slows and stops. The color drains from it as well as all the Chaos Emeralds around him. The barrier dissipates and there's suddenly a rumble.



Knuckles is barreling up the steps with Sonic not too far behind. The echidna looks around in horror, “What did you do!?”

The island rumbles again and begins freefalling from the sky.

Knuckles braces Sonic and Sonic in turn brace Knuckles and Shadow. They hold on until the island crashes into the sea and they’re all knocked around until it finally settles. Knuckles is the first to get up as he circles around the Master Emerald like a nervous wreck.

Sonic stays with Shadow. When Shadow doesn’t respond, he shakes his shoulder. “Shads? You okay?” Sonic asks.

Shadow gets up abruptly and turns so his back is facing Sonic. He wipes the tears from his eyes and levels his breathing, “Yes, I’m alright.”

“Good,” Knuckles shouts and he grabs Shadow by the shoulder, shoving his fist into his jaw, “‘Cause I’m gunna kill ya!”

“Knuckles, chill!” Sonic cries out as he wraps his arms under Knuckles’ armpits and revs his feet backwards to hold him back, “We’ll fix this! We’ve always fixed it in the past!” When he feels Knuckles finally stop struggling he stops too. He stands in front of him and offers, “How about we take the emeralds to my bro’s place and we all have a good old fashioned sleepover? My bro makes a mean hot cocoa!”

“The Master Emerald has gone missing, been stolen, and shattered into pieces; but not once have I seen it in this condition,” Knuckles points out gruffly.

“Oh...kay,” Sonic says slowly and thoughtfully as he taps his fingers together, “How about... my bro takes a look at them and figures out what’s wrong... *And then*, we all have a good old fashioned sleepover!”

“*I’m* taking the Master Emerald to Tails’,” Knuckles states with a stomp, “Whatever you do with the Chaos Emeralds is up to you.” He marches past the two and picks up the large emerald from the altar and walks away with his nose in the air.

“Sweet! See ya there!” Sonic calls out to him with a wave. He turns back over to Shadow who is rubbing his cheek. “Yikes. Knuckles clocked you good,” Sonic cringes and walks up to him. He grazes the spot with his hand and feels Shadow wince from it. Sonic goes to lean in and kiss the bruising spot, but gasps when Shadow pulls him in to kiss his lips. Sonic closes his eyes and decides to melt into it.

Shadow lets their lips separate naturally and he holds the hero against his chest, “The green stone used to control me is inside you.”

Sonic stiffens a little when he hears that, but he nods slowly.

“You aren’t a byproduct of Chaos,” Shadow murmurs against his temple, “You *are* Chaos.”

Sonic sighs and nods once more with a bit more dread.

“You need to tell me these things, Sonic,” Shadow whispers to him.

“You mad?” Sonic asks a bit sheepishly.

“No,” Shadow answers as he pulls away enough to look into his eyes. They’re big and wide and still

so full of life. Shadow trails his finger down the corner of Sonic's eye and says, "But I need to figure out what caused my disappearance in the future now so I can prevent it from coming to fruition."

Sonic groans and goes limp in his arms like he's tired, "Not this again. Can we like... *not* dig up anymore answers?"

"Sonic..." Shadow says surprisingly gentle for how childish Sonic is acting. He sets Sonic upright again and places his finger to the hero's chin, guiding it up to make proper eye contact, "I saw you in the future... tired, overwhelmed, and begging for my aid. I know you have a lot of pride and so do I--I will not deny that--But you cannot let things go and avoid them until they get to that point. I am on your side. I am here to help. We are equals. Please, allow me help you."

"I'm just kinda scared," Sonic confesses quietly.

"What of?" Shadow asks.

"I created this image of myself. I don't want like *all of this* to get in the way of that. I wanna be The Blue Blur! The cool dude with the 'tude! I wanna be Sonic the Hedgehog!" Sonic states, doing various different practiced poses, "Not uh... Chaos: god and overlord of the world or whatever."

"That's so trivial," Shadow states.

"I don't expect you to understand," Sonic says with a sigh as he turns his back to Shadow, tapping his foot with irritation, "Especially not from the guy who slaps a Black Arms logo on his bike. Don't think I didn't notice that."

"I am the last of the Black Arms," Shadow points out, "It's a part of who I am. I'm not going to simply ignore that. I've been trying to reclaim it and make it my own."

Sonic spins around and huffs, "So, that's your solution? Should I go around wearing a T-shirt that has Chaos' face on it and be like 'Look at me! I'm the god of destruction and I totally almost wiped you out, but I'm good now!'"

"It's better than living behind a façade," Shadow points out with no offense in his voice. Just pure sincerity.

Sonic looks away and that statement hits him hard. He frowns and rubs his arms nervously.

"Look, don't worry yourself with this right now. My only goal is to assure your safety in the future. I want to find the answers for my own purposes. You don't have to do anything you aren't comfortable with," Shadow explains, "but if there's anything else you're hiding I just ask that you tell me. If it's of substance, it'll help open up branching paths of our future."

"Okay," Sonic says with a grin, "I totally used your toothbrush last night by accident. I like... forgot for a second that yours was the blue one."

Shadow cracks a small smile and rolls his eyes, "Come on. Let's get to your brother's so we don't burden him with putting Silver down for the night."

## The Next Step



### Chapter Nine: The Next Step

Considering the island fell from the sky, their journey home is significantly shorter. Shadow sits on the tail of the plane this time with his leg crossed over the other as he holds the Chaos Emeralds in his arms. He wonders if they can even call them Chaos Emeralds anymore since there's no Chaos energy inside them. Then again, maybe they couldn't call the Master Emerald that either since it doesn't have said energy to oversee.

All of this was a mess.

When they get back and the plane is properly inside the workshop, Sonic stretches his arms. Shadow takes note of it and realizes why Sonic doesn't do most of the flying even though he's perfectly capable of it. Sonic must feel cramped in the cockpit after awhile.

As they walk inside, Tails has a plethora of devices out and trying to hook them up to the Master Emerald, "I've never seen anything like this! I'm not getting any readings at all! It's as if it isn't even omitting energy!"

Knuckles is sitting on the couch with an annoyed look on his face with Sonic's promised hot cocoa on the coffee table in front of him and baby Silver nodding off on his knee. He doesn't even acknowledge the two as they walk in.

Tails doesn't look up to see who it is when he calls out, "Sonic, you *have* to see this!"

"Yeah, uh... About that, bud," Sonic replies with a tired tone.

Tails glances up and has a look of horror on his face when he sees the Chaos Emeralds in the same state, “No, no, no, no!” He rushes over to Shadow and looks them over. He holds his arms out like a silent request to take them and Shadow hands them over no problem.

Shadow allows the two to fuss over their current situation as he makes his way over to the couch. He sits next to Knuckles awkwardly for a moment before Silver is thrust his way. He sighs in irritation and takes the child securely in his arms. “Thank you,” Shadow grumbles out.

“I only did it because Tails asked me to,” Knuckles grunts back, averting his eyes in the direct opposite direction Shadow is in.

Shadow gets up because he finds this all to be tedious. He’d rather be over by Sonic and Tails who are engaging in one-sided technobabble.

Knuckles’ voice stops him before he can get far though, “I might have a loose allegiance to Sonic, but I can’t say the same for you.”

“Trust me. No one’s asking you to,” Shadow replies with cool anger.

Knuckles fidgets and snarls when he says, “There’s a temple with the Black Arms insignia on it. It’s in Glyphic Canyon.”

Shadow turns to him and lowers his brow, “Why are you telling me this?”

“There’s an altar there... similar to the one on Angel Island,” Knuckles explains like he doesn’t want to tell him.

Shadow gives him a stale look, “And you’re just now telling me this because the Master Emerald is inactive.”

“You inactivated it!” Knuckles shouts back, then rethinks his wording, “You made it inactive!”

“Go there yourself,” Shadow says bitterly.

“I...!” Knuckles looks away with embarrassment before continuing, “I *would*, but it like... runs on some sort of mystical generator things. And... I have reason to believe only a member of the Black Arms can trigger them.”

“Forget it,” Shadow responds through gritted teeth.

Knuckles shifts his eyes down to Silver and then back up at Shadow, “He has Black Arms DNA in him, right?”

Shadow’s scowl hardens and he holds the baby closer to his chest, “*Fine*, but tomorrow. After my shift. Understood? If you lay one hand on Silver...”

Knuckles lifts his hands in surrender, “Don’t bother with your threat. You already agreed.” Knuckles gets up and stretches, “I’m on my way out anyway.”

Just as Shadow sees Knuckles reach the door he states, “You better be headed to Rouge’s.”

Knuckles looks down as a blush creeps up his face. He yanks the door open and shuts it behind him.

Shadow sighs and feels a significant amount of rage leave his body from it. He feels the soft snores against his chest and glances down to see Silver has fallen asleep. He releases his protective grip on the child just a bit so he can rest peacefully.

“Don’t worry about Knux,” Sonic tells him, “The guy’s all bark and no bite.”

“Why are you even friends with him?” Shadow asks with a lower register as to not wake the child in his arms.

“Well, I dunno?” Sonic responds with a shrug, “Probably because I’m currently dating the guy that actually carries out his threats.”

Shadow looks away with a huff.

In retrospect, that probably wasn’t the best thing to say.

Luckily, Tails chimes in to save Sonic’s ass, “Aw. Looks like Silver’s all tuckered out. I set up Sonic’s bedroom. You two can sleep here tonight so you don’t have to wake him.”

“That sounds like a great idea,” Sonic replies enthusiastically until Tails’ words actually register. And when they do it’s like a record scratching in Sonic’s brain. “W-wait! My room?”

“Yeah,” Tails says, “Is that a problem?”

Sonic snorts and responds nervously, “No, no. Of course not. That’s not a problem. Why would that be a problem?”

Shadow can tell it’s a problem. Unlike the whole Chaos thing, Shadow doesn’t really care what nonsense Sonic is hiding in his bedroom. Although, he’s thinking the whole seeing all of his dirty laundry metaphor was a bluff.

“Just uh…” Sonic slowly backs away toward his bedroom, “Let me uh… clean up.”

Tails raises an eyebrow at him, “There’s nothing to clean up. I got it ready for you. New comforters and everything.”

“Sonic,” Shadow says a bit exhausted, “If it’s problematic, I’ll sleep in the attic.”

“What? No,” Sonic shakes his head, “I’m not making you sleep up there.” He taps his foot on the ground a bit sporadically before hanging his head in defeat, “Alright, come on.” He guides Shadow over to his bedroom and places his hand on the doorknob. He turns sharply and squints his eyes at him, “But if you make fun of me…”

“I assure you,” Shadow replies with a sigh, “You have nothing to worry about.”

Sonic puts on a brave face and opens the door. He allows Shadow to go in first and he’s kind of shriveling in his stance at the doorway.

Shadow walks inside and flicks on the light. He’s expecting to see something embarrassing or disgusting, but all he sees are racecar posters and model airplanes hanging from the ceiling. When he walks in, he spots a display case with a black and red custom-made racing uniform with shoes to match. There’s a few model cars inside the case as well. He glances over at the large flat screen TV tucked in the corner with dozens of gaming systems and game cases neatly organized on a shelf next to it. Shadow makes his way over to the bed and notes the checkerboard pattern on the comforter and a box of comic books next to the nightstand.

Shadow turns back to Sonic and questions, “I don’t get what you’re hiding.”

Sonic scrunches his brow and rubs his neck nervously, “I’m… a huge nerd.”

“And that’s news to me?” Shadow remarks as he takes a seat on the bed.

Sonic squeaks and he can hear Tails laughing in the kitchen. Sonic slams his door shut and marches over to the bed. He glares down at Shadow and looks like he’s going to fight with him, but instead gets on his knees and begs, “Please, don’t tell anyone!!!”

Shadow rubs the bridge of his nose and groans because this conversation is painfully pointless, “I don’t even want to talk about it *now*. Why would I tell anyone?”

“Just don’t, please,” Sonic continues to beg, “Please, Shadow! Pleeeease!”

Silver whimpers and stirs in Shadow arms and Shadow mutters lowly, “Get off the ground. Silver is acting more mature than you right now.”

Sonic gives him big, shiny puppy dog eyes, “Promise me.”

“Fine,” Shadow says with exasperation, “I promise. Now, quit it.”

“Thank you,” Sonic whispers excitedly as he wraps his arms around the dark hero’s neck.

Shadow falls back a bit, but braces the three of their weights on one arm. His hand slips and slides under the pillow and his finger grazes something metallic. He hooks his finger around it and pulls it out, eyes widening when he sees it. It was his old inhibitor ring. “You kept this?” Shadow asks a bit speechless.

Sonic sees what Shadow is referring to and panics. He grabs it and holds it behind his back. “I... uh... Well, you see...” Sonic stammers, not really sure where his train of thought is going.

Shadow’s face softens, “Sonic.”

“I gave Rouge the other one,” Sonic blurts out, but covers his mouth quickly after he says it.

Shadow looks away a bit surprised, eyes darting back and forth as if having trouble taking in this information.

“We thought you were gone,” Sonic murmurs as he nervously rubs his thumb across the ring, “I mean, I dunno? I was gunna keep them both, but the moment I met back with everyone else... She just stared me in the eyes and asked where you were. I didn’t know how close you two were...” Sonic looks down at it with a sad, lonely smile and whispers, “It got me through the toughest three months of my life.” He hands it over to Shadow and says, “But if you want it back I understand.”

Shadow folds Sonic’s hands around the inhibitor and locks eyes with him. It was that same sad, lonely smile he saw from before, but now it’s in the present. Sonic has harbored these feelings long before then. Shadow pulls Sonic into a hug with his free arm and smooths his hand down Sonic’s quills soothingly, “Keep it. I’m glad it could aid you while I could not.”

“It’s not really a replacement for the real thing,” Sonic jokes, but his full smile doesn’t reach his face.

“No,” Shadow murmurs, “but the sentiment is appreciated.”

Sonic fidgets under Shadow’s gaze and he can’t really bring himself to look back.

“Perhaps there’s another ring you could give me,” Shadow suggests with a smirk.

Sonic’s brows shoot up and he almost falls off the bed reaching for the drawer. He feels Shadow grab him and he continues on pulling the drawer open like it’s normal. He shuffles around it for a

moment before pulling them out. “Will you—ah!” Sonic juggles them in his hands and one falls to the ground. He rolls out of Shadow arm, grabs it, and gets on his knee. He has a big nervous smile on his face as his quills skewed as he asks, “Will you marry me?”

“I already accepted,” Shadow feels the corner of his mouth quirk up in what one could argue is a smile.

“Y-yeah, well... you rejected it too,” Sonic shrinks back a little, “So...”

“I do,” Shadow responds without hesitation.

Sonic takes Shadow’s hand and slips the ring on his finger. He gasps when he feels Shadow take the other one and Sonic looks away a bit embarrassed as he holds his hand out for Shadow. The ring feels familiar and comfortable around his finger, like he hadn’t noticed how much he truly missed it until right now.

“Now, let’s get some rest,” Shadow says as his finger rests on Sonic’s chin, “I have another long day ahead of me tomorrow.”

“Right,” Sonic nods and gets to his feet. He walks around to the other side of the bed, flicks the lights off, and watches Shadow lay Silver down next to him. Sonic lays on the other end, acting like a barrier for the edge so the child doesn’t roll off.

Shadow’s eyes are closed and Sonic thinks he’s sleeping for a moment before he murmurs, “You recall saying that you love me as I am?”

“Gee, Shadow. My memory isn’t that bad,” Sonic jokes.

“The same applies to you,” Shadow states, disregarding the joke.

Sonic feels himself blush a little and he’s glad the room is shrouded in darkness, although Silver’s glowing Chaos energy might be giving him away a little.

“There’s more than enough room for your things in our home now,” Shadow adds quietly, like he’s slowly nodding off.

“Thanks, Shads,” Sonic responds sincerely as he slides his hand across the bed.

Shadow’s hand meets his halfway. They both lean in closer and Silver settles down and cuddles between them, letting out a content sigh.

Sonic smiles happily down at Silver and whispers, “We have the coolest kid, Shads.”

“I’m aware,” he states with a low laugh. He places his hand over Sonic’s eyes and whispers, “Now rest.”

Sonic pouts, but closes his eyes anyway. He takes Shadow’s hand and holds it against his heart. He lets himself drift to sleep shortly after to the content thought of his happily little family.

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The annoying beeping of his alarm wakes him up like it does every morning, but for some reason he feels more dread in pulling himself out of bed than most mornings. Regardless, he sits up and glances down at the child when he hears soft babbles. Silver’s eyes are wide open and he’s staring at Shadow with a big smile as he holds his hands out to him.

Shadow doesn't pick him up. Instead, leans over to smooths his quills down as he whispers, "Go back to sleep, young one. It's early still."

Silver's eyelids droop a little, but pop back open. He's trying to stay awake.

Shadow scoots Silver closer to Sonic and watches at the baby latches onto him. The ebony hero smiles and places a pillow in the spot he had just been occupying. He gets up and makes his way around the bed to Sonic and presses a kiss to his forehead, whispering, "I have to go, but I'll be back around 4."

Sonic grumbles in his sleep and holds his arms up much like Silver just had. He whines out pitifully, "Noooo. Come baaack."

Shadow shakes his head and guides Sonic to Silver's side again. Sonic's arm instinctively holds the child close to his chest protectively and Silver nuzzles into it. Shadow smiles softly at the two and carefully makes his way out of the room, shutting the door quietly behind him.

He makes his way over to the coffee table where the unfinished hot cocoa is and scoops it up before walking into the kitchen. He rinses the mug off and sets it inside to be washed later. Shadow notes the soft snoring and realizes Tails has fallen asleep over his work on the kitchen counter. It doesn't look like there was much progress made, but he's been surprised a number of times by the fox's brain. He constructed a fully functional Chaos Emerald from scratch in the past. So, who knows.

Shadow eyes the small blanket draped over the headrest of the couch and snags it. He wraps it around Tails' shoulders and frowns when he hears him mumble in his sleep, "No, Sonic... the calibrations aren't complete... It needs a few more..." The rest trails off into inaudible gibberish.

He hopes Tails isn't losing sleep over all of this.

Shadow slips out the door just as the sun is rising.

It's a miracle that Rouge is at work early, floating around like she's weightless, and wearing her complete face of make-up for a change before even getting to her locker. She even waves at Topaz and gives her a friendly good morning. Which throws the poor woman off and she almost runs into a group of her colleagues.

"You'll never guess what happened last night," Rouge says to Shadow, fluttering her eyelashes, "An angel came to my window."

Angel. Shadow rolls his eyes. He's met kinder demons. He is glad that Rouge's spirits are lifted though. "Is that so," is all Shadow can muster to say. Especially since his jaw still feels a bit raw from said angel.

"I cannot believe he left his Master Emerald just to see little old me," Rouge goes on to explain.

Right. He left it. He left it for Tails to fuss over. Shadow keeps his mouth shut though. He just nods with her and organizes a few papers he still needed to look over before their meeting starts. He jumps when he hears Rouge gasp loudly. "What?" Shadow asks, looking around as if there were a fire.

"You're wearing your engagement ring," she points out, "And here I thought you were hiding it somewhere."

Shadow blushes and shuts his locker, "Yes, it's not like I'm ashamed of our relationship or anything."



“No,” Rouge states like she didn’t believe that for a second, “but I just figured you were a private person.”

“Private?” Shadow sighs and starts to walk to the meeting room, “Nothing in my life is going to be private while I’m with him. I just have to accept that.”

She flutters above Shadow and smirks down at him, “If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you’re excited about it and *want* people to know.”

“Think what you will,” Shadow replies dismissively.

Rouge pouts a little and holds her hand out like she’s looking at an imaginary ring of her own, “What do you think mine would look like? I hope it’s a big diamond that sparkles in the sunlight.”

“Why are you so obsessed with this all of a sudden?” Shadow asks as he sits down and gets to work on the papers in front of him.

She taps her finger to her lip and continues regardless of Shadow’s statement, “I bet it’ll be something special and meaningful. He’ll probably search the world for the best gemstone. He’s a treasure hunter after all.”

Shadow kind of just laughs under his breath. Whatever the hell Knuckles did to woo Rouge last night worked. He’s starting to think love is making them both soft. That’s kind of a scary thought.

The day goes by relatively quickly. Mostly because Shadow’s mind is preoccupied with other things. Which he knows isn’t something he should be doing while on the clock, but he can’t help but wonder why a Black Arms insignia would be on an earth ruin. Perhaps if they had tried to take it over in the past maybe. He’s not sure though. It’s really odd to him.

Rouge is already gone by the time Shadow is shutting down Omega for the day. He has a feeling he knows where she’s gone. He just hopes Knuckles doesn’t keep him waiting. He wants to get this done and over with. His schedule was busy enough as is.

# Absolution



## Chapter Ten: Absolution

When he gets back to the workshop, Tails is in the garage hooking up the Master Emerald to some sort of generator. He sees the guy is having a hard time with one of the larger cables, so he rushes up to help.

“Thanks, Shadow,” Tails says with relief as he wipes the sweat off his forehead, “Trying to find anything powerful enough to connect to this thing has been a difficult feat.”

Shadow just nods, “I’m sure.”

“Sonic’s inside if you need him,” Tails explains as he gathers more wires together, “Although, I haven’t seen Knuckles around yet.”

“It’s fine,” Shadow says like it’s no big deal, “I have a hunch I know where he’s run off to.”

“Yeah, he kinda does his own thing,” Tails states with a small laugh, “Although, it’s inevitable that he’ll return. He doesn’t leave the Master Emerald in anyone’s hands for too long.”

“I’ll check in on Sonic and Silver in the meantime then,” Shadow states as he waves once in Tails’ direction, “Good luck with your work.”

“The luck is appreciated. I’ll need it,” Tails calls out to him as he’s walking away.

Shadow goes to walk to the front door, but stops when he sees Amy gathering up some planks of

wood for the porch that's being reconstructed. "Oh, uh... Sorry. I'll get all this junk out of your way," she says as she moves the tools she's working with. She isn't wearing her usual skirt today, but overalls with her hair tied back.

Shadow glances at the porch she's rebuilding for the workshop and, from what he can remember, it's starting to look a lot nicer than before. "I wasn't aware you were good with a hammer," Shadow says with a smirk as he leaves the sentence hanging on purpose, "That kind of hammer at least."

"Yeah, well, I picked up a few things here and there," she replies with a smile, "I've installed a few shelves in my apartment, but nothing fancy or anything. This is actually my first time doing something like this. Most of what I've done so far has been under Tails' supervision."

Shadow nods to her, "I'll leave you to your work then."

"Thanks!" Amy says back as she swings the hammer back and forth, but cries out when she drops it, almost nailing her toe.

Shadow doesn't even notice when he walks inside. He's currently scanning the area. It was strange that Sonic wasn't outside with his friends. He's not really an overseer of work or anything, but he still manages to keep them company.

When Shadow doesn't find him in the living area, he quietly makes his way over to the bedrooms. He stops when he hears something. It sounds like a guitar, but it isn't Sonic's electric one. No, it sounds more like the soft plucking of an acoustic guitar. It's coming from Sonic's bedroom too. He gently pushes the door open wider and sees Sonic sitting crossed legged on the bed with Silver in his lap. Shadow holds his breath when he hears Sonic stop playing.

Silver fusses in Sonic's lap and lets out whines. He kicks his little legs out in a temper tantrum.

"Easy. Easy there, buddy," Sonic murmurs to him with this softness that almost makes Shadow's heart melt. Sonic hushes him and runs his hand down the baby's front quills. Sonic's voice is a bit more chipper when he speaks again, "Don't like the classics, huh?"

Silver kicks his legs out again and cries out loudly once before it forms into hiccupped sobs.

"Yeah, me neither. That twinkle, twinkle little star stuff is overrated," Sonic replies as if Silver had responded to him. Shadow can hear Sonic tapping his foot on the ground thoughtfully before reaching over to his drawer. He pulls out a pad of paper and flips through it. He erases and scribbles a few notes down as the baby fusses in his lap more. He's juggling the two, but doing it rather well.

Shadow is about to step inside and make his presence known so he can assist when Sonic reaches for his guitar again. Shadow pauses and Sonic takes in a breath of air. He looks surprisingly focused and mature as his fingers begin to play a soft, slow melody. It causes Silver's whines to soften a bit.

Sonic's voice comes out in a calming melody that sounds like a lullaby, "In the night light, do you see what you dream? All your troubles, are they all what they seem? Look around you, then you may realize, All the preachers, all with their lies. And I might know of our future. But then you still control the past. Only you'll know if you'll be together. Only you'll know if we shall last."

The words are nothing like what he's heard with the other song Sonic had performed for him. The lyrics were a lot deeper than he's used to. Well, when it came to Sonic at least. It's actually kind of beautiful. His voice is full of emotion and depth. It isn't emotional in the usual sense, but it's still uplifting and confident.

Especially when Sonic continues as he gazes down at Silver with an encouraging smile, "'Cause

every night I will save your life. And every night I will be with you. ‘Cause every night I still lay awake and I dream of an absolution.”

Shadow places his hand on his chest and looks away. How could he have accused Sonic of being selfish and not caring? How could he assume Sonic only saw Silver as a weapon? Especially when each word is gradually more and more certain. He feels like a hypocrite for not giving Sonic more time to get used to this. It was a big step. He can’t help, but feel guilty especially when Sonic is looking down at that child like he’s every little spark and hope for the future.

Shadow glances up when he hears the chords fall a bit quieter. Silver is finally sleeping soundly in Sonic’s lap. It almost looks like Sonic is going to stop, but continues a bit lower as his brow furrows and his smile drops to a frown, “In the night light do you see what you dream? All your triumph and all you’ll ever be. Look around you, then you may realize...” Sonic swallows and stops. He places the guitar to the side and lets out a defeated sigh as he finishes in a whisper, “Happiness lies trapped in misery.” The song clearly isn’t done, especially by how Sonic picks up the pad of paper again and looks it over.

It’s in that moment that Shadow realizes Sonic must have written this while they were separated. Shadow stalks up behind Sonic. He slides an arm around Sonic’s body to stabilize him and a hand over his mouth to muffle the gasp he knows will come. Sonic jolts a bit, but Shadow’s arm stops him. Silver still lays in Sonic lap sleeping peacefully.

Sonic turns to look at Shadow and then back to the clock, “Is it four already? Sorry, I guess I lost track of time.”

Shadow just shakes his head, indicating that it’s alright. He holds Sonic so the hero’s back is against his chest and he rests his chin on Sonic’s shoulder. His eyes rest on the child who still has tears damp on his cheeks. Shadow wonders how long he’s been putting up a fight today. With the tired look Sonic has on his face he can tell it was awhile.

He carefully takes the kid from Sonic’s arms and walks over to the crib that’s in the corner of the room. It’s the one from home so Sonic must have gone back at one point. How he got it here Shadow doesn’t know, but if he had to guess he’d say he went back with Amy at one point and she reconstructed it for him.

Shadow places the resting child into the crib and offers his hand to Sonic. Sonic takes it gladly and he pulls the hero onto his feet before they walk out. Shadow closes the door quietly and watches as Sonic collapses on the couch. “Rough day?” Shadow asks as he joins him.

“Nah, not really,” Sonic says with a shrug, “My bro got the Master Emerald up and running for a good minute, but it like... turned all the lights off in the house.”

“It tripped the breaker?” Shadow asks.

Sonic points at him as his eyes light up, “Yeah, *that*. Well, after that happened Silver just started going nuts. He was grabbing his head a lot too. So like... me and Ames went out to get the crib and some baby aspirin for him.”

“Perhaps it startled him,” Shadow reasons.

Sonic leans back and pillows his head with his arms, “I dunno? I’m just glad he’s sleeping now. I mean... I love the little guy, but he has a temper.”

Shadow nods like he knows. The two weeks they were separated taught him that hard lesson. As

much as he feels for Sonic, he's glad Silver doesn't only react poorly to him.

"You bought a new guitar," Shadow points out softly.

"Uh... Yeah, that was earlier in the day though. I went back home the first time to make sure Chocoba was fed and I saw my electric guitar and thought... 'Ya know, this thing is probably gonna be collecting dust now that we have Silver.' So, I sold it at a pawn shop and traded it in for the acoustic one. This way I can play little lullabies for Silvy," Sonic explains.

"When I told you to sell it, I didn't mean for you to. That was just my anger talking," Shadow confesses a bit embarrassed.

"Huh?" Sonic looks confused and thinks about it. The memory pops in his head and he waves a hand on Shadow dismissively, "No, don't worry about that. I genuinely wanted to trade it. Besides, I had some extra cash from selling the amp too and got a cool checkerboard strap for it."

"Does it... play any differently?" Shadow asks a bit curiously.

"No, not really," Sonic says with a shrug, "I mean, the fret board is big and clunky, but I have pretty dexterous fingers." Sonic wiggles his fingers a bit suggestively and winks at Shadow.

Shadow rests his arm behind the couch's headrest and crosses his legs, leaning in closer to Sonic as he murmurs, "Perhaps you can put those to good use."

Sonic sticks his tongue out at Shadow and opens his mouth wider when he sees Shadow leaning in closer. He welcomes Shadow's mouth against his and how he immediately wraps his lips around his tongue, pressing his own against his. Sonic keeps his promise as he slides his hands up Shadow chest and around his neck. His fingers glide up against the curve where Shadow's quills arc upwards. He traces it up and back down to his head, earning himself low moans against his mouth. Sonic moans back in response as his fingers follow up to Shadow's ears. He feels Shadow shudder against him and pull him in closer.

Shadow snarls and bites Sonic lip. It isn't hard, but just enough pressure as he lets it slide from his teeth tantalizingly slow. He watches how Sonic's cheeks flare with heat and his tongue lick the tender spot. Shadow embraces him lovingly and whispers, "You're right. Your fingers are like magic."

Sonic gives him hooded eyes and an absolutely wicked smirk, "If Knux doesn't get here in the next ten minutes, maybe we can pull up the old pilot seat from the attic."

Just like it's on cue, Knuckles walks into the door and gives them a look of disgust, "I'm gonna pretend like I didn't hear that." He marches over to the kitchen and pulls out a glass before filling it with water.

Sonic practically trips over the coffee table with the force of how quickly he jumps up. He's burying his face in his hands and has an expression on his face that can only be described as wanting to die.

Shadow doesn't even react to it. Instead, he hooks his arm around the couch's headrest once more and glances at Knuckles from over his shoulder, remarking with, "Yeah, and I'm going to pretend like I don't know why Rouge walked into work on cloud nine."

Knuckles immediately spits out all the water that he was just about to swallow and gasps for air.

*Vengeance.*

Knuckle slams the cup on the countertop and glares at Shadow, "I hate that you two work together!"

"I'm not fond of her being with a half-wit, but I tend to keep my opinions to myself," Shadow states with a bored tone like he's not even worth his time.

"Half-wit!?" Knuckles growls and shouts back, "I have twice as many wits as you do!"

"Now, that's a radical statement," Shadow responds too calmly with a low laugh.

"Why you!?" Knuckles grits out like he's about to let his fists do the talking.

Sonic eases back down on the couch and tries to signal for Shadow to stop. He admits to riling Knuckles up on purpose from time-to-time, but Knuckles really looks like he's going to go through with his promises if pushed further.

Suddenly, Amy is walking in the door looking flustered as Blaze follows. The three stop and watch them in confusion. Amy turns to Sonic with an accusing look, "Did you send Blaze on a wild goose chase for *weeks on end* to find me because you told her I could predict the future!?"

Sonic cringes and sinks behind the sofa. He knew that would bite him in the ass sooner or later. For some reason though, he thought it would be a lot sooner than this.

Shadow gets up and acts like a protective barrier in front of Sonic. At first, Sonic feels grateful, but then he realizes that Shadow isn't protecting him from Amy. He's protecting him from Blaze.

Blaze bows to Sonic, "It's an honor to see you again, Your Majesty." She turns to Shadow and bows to him as well, "The same for you, one who is not Mephiles."

"Shadow," he corrects with a snarl.

"Shadow," she repeats, bowing once more to show her apologies.

Knuckles walks over to Blaze with a smirk aimed at Shadow, "Are you afraid of this little girl?" He holds his hand out to Blaze, "Knuckles. I don't know if we were properly introduced, but anyone who is an enemy of Shadow is a friend of mine."

Blaze nods and takes his hand into a firm grip to shake, "It is nice to meet you, Knuckles."

Knuckles feels every joint pop in his finger when Blaze grips his hand. He waves it a bit to get the feeling back. He ignores the shit-eating grin Sonic is giving him as he walks back toward the counter.

Amy has her hands on her hips as she waits for an explanation from the blue hero, "Well?"

"Well..." Sonic trails off because he doesn't really have anything to say for himself. He glances back at Blaze and asks, "How the heck did you survive for two weeks with no job, money, or ID?"

"There was a local villager in the Mystic Ruin's bayou. He looked to be a descendant of my people. He showed me the way of the land and how to survive with the elements. He was actually quite wise," Blaze explains calmly.

Sonic stifles his laughter, but can't contain himself. He's smacking his fist on the coffee table and laughing so hard his eye are watering, "Holy crud! No way! You've been crashing with Big the freaking Cat!?"

Amy looks offended, "Don't talk about him like that! Big is actually really friendly."

“Big is a frea—“ Sonic goes to say, but sees Blaze’s eyes narrow at him, “A uh... free spirited guy like me! Love the dude!”

Shadow just blinks at him.

“Not like that Shads,” Sonic states with a forced smile. He gets in an awkward pose and feels like everyone’s eyes are on him now. “Hey, uh... we’ll catch ya two later. I gotta go with Knux and Shads to uh... do some Chaos Emerald stuff,” Sonic sends them some finger guns and rushes out the door.

Amy tries to stop him, but he’s too fast. She stomps her foot on the porch when she sees he’s long gone, “Sonic the Hedgehog!!! We’re talking about all of this when you get back!!!”

## A Glimpse into the Past



### Chapter Eleven: A Glimpse into the Past

As Knuckles is walking with Shadow, both whom are carrying the Master Emerald and the Chaos Emeralds respectively, he stomps his feet with each step he takes and spouts out, “I can’t believe that spiky, blue jerk bailed on me!!!”

Shadow just gives Knuckles a bored expression, “How? Does he not run from his responsibilities on a constant? Why are you surprised?”

Knuckles glares at the ebony hero, “I *hate* you.”

“I don’t care for your company much either,” Shadow responds evenly, “but also that isn’t much of a surprise. I’d request for you to be more observant, but I can tell you’re an egocentric recluse.”

Knuckles is seething, wishing he knew exactly what Shadow called him so he could retaliate with something clever.

Shadow stops under one of the many palm trees in the area and sighs, “But moreover, you requested my assistance and not Sonic’s. You should have been clearer.”

“Whatever! I don’t need that over glorified pincushion’s help! And if I could get the generators up and running, I wouldn’t need *your* help either!” Knuckles shouts with a frown twisted on his face, “The next time I see Sonic, I’ll give him what for!”

Shadow glances behind him and up at the branches before speaking a bit monotone, “You can come



out now. Amy is preoccupied with the porch once more.”

The blue blur hops out of the tree and lands in between them, “Aw! Nothin’ gets past you, Shads.” He turns to Knuckles with a smirk, “I’m ready for you to dish up that ‘what for’ now, Knux.”

Knuckles turns away with his nose in the air, “I don’t even need your help. In fact, why don’t you stay here and actually get punished for the things you mess up.”

Sonic just lets out a laugh and leans against Knuckles’ shoulder, “But, Knux. My buddy. My pal. You’ll need me here to ID your body when Shadow gets done with you.”

A low, sinister laugh hums at Shadow’s vocal chords as he walks past the two.

Sonic gives Shadow an astonished look as he huge smile crosses his face, “Did you just laugh at my joke!?”

“Of course not. Don’t be ridiculous,” Shadow responds with his back facing them.

Sonic rushes over to him and swings his arms around Shadow’s neck as he gets a half-assed piggyback ride, “You *so* did!”

“Infer what you will,” Shadow states with a slight smirk, allowing Sonic to hang on him.

Knuckles groans and follows the two as they continue to flirt. This was going to be a long, tedious journey.

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They get to the edge of the giant canyon and the ruins are at the base of it. They look a lot more banged up than the other ones Sonic has come across. Almost like it was blown out of the sky at one point.

“Whoa,” Sonic says with awe as his voice echoes and carries out down the cliff, “Those ruins are pretty ruined for, well... *ruins*.”

“That *is* why they’re called ruins, Sonic,” Knuckles states with a huff, “They’ve probably been sitting here for eons.”

Shadow stares down at them with a calculative look before murmuring, “No... Sonic might have a point.”

Sonic’s face brightens up, “Yeah!?”

“Stop defending him,” Knuckles grumbles out.

“I’m serious,” Shadow replies with no intention of starting a fight, “Observe. There’s soot and char marks on the outside as if it were shot down by some sort of explosive. While yes, there are signs of aging, it looks to have been done only about four of five years back.”

Sonic sticks his tongue out at Knuckles.

Knuckles just shoves his hand in Sonic’s face and pushes him back, “Whatever. We’re not gunna find anything standing up here.” Knuckles begins climbing down and gliding while balancing the Master Emerald.

“For once, he’s right,” Shadow tells Sonic as he hands over the Chaos Emeralds to him, “Hold these

for a moment.”

Sonic wraps his arms around the emeralds as they fall into his grip suddenly, “Oh, uh... Sure, but...”

Before Sonic can question it, Shadow is pulling the hero into his arms bridal style. He hops off the side of the cliff as his shoes ignite to life. He jumps from one cliff side to the next quite gracefully, descending lower and lower into the canyon.

As they pass Knuckles, Sonic waves at him and calls out, “See ya at the bottom, Knux!”

This agitates Knuckles and causes him to glide down faster.

Shadow finally gets to the bottom, letting his hover shoes stop their decent before his feet meet the ground lightly. He places Sonic on the ground and takes the emeralds back into his arms. “I apologize. I know you’re fully capable of handling this type of terrain, but I figured it would be easier to transport the emeralds this way,” Shadow explains to him.

“Hey, I’m not complaining,” Sonic says as he holds his hands up to him, “Besides, it’s nice to ride in style once in awhile.”

Knuckles’ feet come in contact with the ground heavily as he meets them shortly after, “I woulda gotten down here sooner, but *my* emerald is bigger.”

“Uh-huh,” Sonic says with a snicker.

“We have seven emeralds,” Shadow explains, “They probably equate to roughly the same mass.”

Knuckles just stares at Shadow for a moment before lugging the Master Emerald over to the entrance of the ruins. He points at the orb that’s next to the entrance, “Just touch that.”

Shadow raises an eyebrow and walks over to it. His eyes scan the area and he notices the translucent barrier with the Black Arms insignia on it. He can see the altar just beyond it, eying it like it doesn’t make sense.

Sonic walks up next to him and looks over the barrier, “That looks like the ones that were on the Black Comet.”

“Yes,” Shadow whispers back to him, “Please, be on your guard.” Shadow turns back to Knuckles and lowers his brow, “How do I know if when I touch this it won’t signal another armada of Black Arms soldiers?”

“Look, I’m not thrilled to be here either. I didn’t even want to tell you about it,” Knuckles explains, “These ruins aren’t like anything I’ve seen before. All I know is that I can’t get through.”

Sonic lowers his voice to Shadow, “Dude, Knux is on our side. He’d never purposely lead us into a trap. He’s my bud. You can trust him.”

Shadow stares into Sonic’s eyes for a long while. Shadow seems unsure. He trusts Sonic. He trusts him with his life. It’s Knuckles he doesn’t really trust. Although, Sonic’s eyes do give him some reassurance. So, he lifts his hand to the orb and places his palms against it. The orb glows bright green and the barrier opens for them.

“Woo-hoo! It worked!” Sonic shouts and his voices carry through the entrance of the ruins. He goes to step inside, but Shadow’s arm stops him.

“You are to stay behind me the entire time. Do I make myself clear?” Shadow states roughly.

Knuckles stands next to Shadow and exchanges a look with him. He nods to him and Shadow nods back in response. They both walk into the temple first with Sonic in tow.

“Ugh,” Sonic objects with a groan, “Are you two seriously escorting me right now? You *do* realize I’m the world renown hero, right?”

Sonic’s protests fall on deaf ears though as they travel deeper into the temple. All around are pictures of what appears to be Black Arms soldiers bowing. The pattern travels all the way back beyond the altar to a blank panel in the wall. No doubt an entrance to another area in the ruins.

Shadow and Knuckles walk up the steps of the altar. Knuckles signals for Shadow to place the emeralds onto the pedestals first and Shadow does so. One-by-one. Praying that this won’t lead to something horrible. When he places the last one down, he makes his way back to Knuckles. The echidna looks hesitant at first, but places the Master Emerald down in the center anyway.

“Nothing happened,” Shadow states.

“Not yet,” Knuckles replies grimly. He takes a breath before lifting his hands up. He begins to recite Tikal’s prayer and with each word the emeralds grow brighter and brighter. Once the last word is uttered, the emeralds are at their normal color and luminosity.

“Incredible,” Shadow whispers in a bit of awe.

There’s a loud rumble and the blank panel opens up on its own, leading to another room in the back. The three gravitate to the entrance and make their way inside. Although it just appears to be an empty room.

“What a jip,” Sonic remarks like he’s disappointed.

“Wait,” Knuckles pipes up as he makes his way into the center of the room, “There’s another one of those generators.”

Shadow makes his way over to Knuckles and like before places his hand upon on. It glows bright green like last time, but instead of opening up a path the lights seep into the ground and project pictures on the walls. The lights burn images against the stone panels and the light die down after a moment or two.

What’s left is astonishing. The pattern of bowing creatures continue from the other room and in the center of the wall is a giant lava beast, roaring at the sky. The lights from the generator project the three green eyes on its head.

“That’s Iblis,” Shadow whispers.

“What?” Sonic questions, “How do you know?”

“I saw Iblis in a vision when I made contact with the Master Emerald,” Shadow explains as he walks closer to the burned image. He lifts his hand and touches the charred wall carefully. “Did the Black Arms worship Iblis?” He asks in wonder.

“They rose from Iblis’ ashes,” a voice answers.

Shadow turns to see who spoke and jolts back a bit when he sees the young echidna girl. He looks at her in confusion and stares back at Knuckles and Sonic for an explanation.

“Tikal,” Knuckles says in awe.

“Hello again,” she responds with a happy tone. She turns to Sonic and bows, “It’s also nice to see you too.”

“Uh...” Sonic seems to be at a loss of words, “Charmed?”

She turns back to Shadow and holds her hand out to him, “I’m glad we can finally meet.”

Shadow gives her an unsure look and takes a step back, “Who are you? And why is it you know of me?”

Tikal seems confused for a moment before it clicks with her. “Oh, I see,” her face brightens a bit before turning back to the image before them. She places her hand on the stone wall and all of the ashes fall away. Her body glows and she forms into a red light, fading into the wall.

The walls shift and open up once more to a long corridor with newly lit torches lighting the way.

“Welp,” Sonic speaks up as if to break the tension, “We got the emeralds up and running. I think it’s time to leave.”

“You’re joking,” Shadow replies as he lowers his brow.

“No, I’m not,” Sonic says with a huff, “C’mon.”

“I need to know what’s going on first,” Shadow tells him as he goes to walk down the corridor.

“Why?” Sonic questions, “Why do you always need to know? Why can’t you just leave it be?”

“Because,” Shadow states with a bite to his voice, “If it’s connected to your death in the future, I need to know so I can prevent it.”

“But... like, you said it yourself,” Sonic says, “You said time in nonlinear. So, that might not happen!”

Shadow whirls around and grabs Sonic by the arm, pulling him forward. He stares deep into his eyes with an intense look and retaliates, “If I do nothing, then the path we walk down won’t change! I will be *damned* if I watch you die in my arms a second time!”

Sonic looks shaken. He swallows roughly as his eyes dart back and forth unable choose which one of Shadow’s fiery irises to focus on. He winces under Shadow’s grip and feels it loosen. He pulls away and crosses his arms across his chest, “Fine. Go.”

Shadow lets out a sigh and tries to cool his anger, “I know you’re afraid to uncover the truth, but...”

“I’m not afraid,” Sonic turns away with a pout.

“Sonic,” Knuckles says as he steps forward, “Come on. I think we should all go together.”

“No thanks,” Sonic turns away from Knuckles now.

Knuckles exchanges a look with Shadow before trying again. “Sonic,” the echidna says a bit sterner, “I don’t want to know as much as you, but I don’t want you dead either. You’re my friend.”

“No way,” Sonic shakes his head and walks out the doorway they came in, “I’m outta here.”

Knuckles sighs and rests his hands on his hips, “That guy...”

“Please, excuse me,” Shadow tells Knuckles, “Let me speak to him alone for a moment.”

“Be my guest,” Knuckles grunts as he leans against the wall as if making himself comfortable, knowing this might take awhile.

Shadow follows Sonic out of the room. He finds the hero sitting on the altar steps staring down at his phone like he’s trying to preoccupy himself.

“Leave me alone, Shads,” Sonic calls out when he can hear his footsteps getting closer.

Shadow walks over to him regardless. He takes a seat next to the hero and asks, “Are you alright?”

“No,” Sonic grumbles out, “There’s no signal out here.”

Shadow sighs and places his hand on the phone, guiding it down. He watches Sonic groan with agitation and roll his eyes at Shadow. Shadow doesn’t react to it though. Instead, he leans in closer and asks, “What’s troubling you?”

“Oh, I dunno?” Sonic says as he raises his hands over his head, “Probably the fact that you’re somehow linked to Iblis. Ya know, the monster that totally wrecked the future.”

“You don’t know that,” Shadow tries to say.

Sonic snorts and lets out a bitter laugh, “Oh come on, Shads! It’s obvious!”

“You... treated Iblis very kind and gently in the future,” Shadow murmurs to him.

Sonic just begins laughing at that.

“I’m serious,” Shadow states.

Sonic’s laughter melts into hiccupping sobs as he buries his face into his hands, “I know you are.”

Shadow looks taken aback by Sonic’s reaction, but places a hand on his back in a reassuring gesture. “Tell me what’s wrong,” Shadow urges as he guides Sonic’s face out of his hands.

“My job was easy. Defeat anything that tries to destroy the earth,” Sonic explains softly. He lets Shadow’s hands guide his face out of his own hands as tears begin to fall from his face, “But what would I really choose when it came down to it? If I had a choice to destroy you in order to keep the earth safe, would I?”

“I’d sacrifice myself before you’d even have to make that choice—” Shadow begins to say, but is cut off by Sonic’s mouth silencing him. His eyes soften as his thumb wipes the tears from Sonic’s eyes.

“I’d probably let the world burn,” Sonic confesses like he’s disgusted with himself for even thinking it.

Shadow looks away with a painful expression before whispering, “I know...”

“I’m the worst hero ever,” Sonic says with a sad smile.

“You aren’t perfect,” Shadow responds as he runs a hand down the side of Sonic’s face, “and that’s okay. Neither am I.” He takes in Sonic’s eyes and just loses himself in them for a moment before he continues, “We can change the future though. We can stop it from happening. We just need to accept

that there are things out of our control and we have to take in the truth despite how hard it may be.”

Sonic pulls his knees up to his chest and pouts his lip out. He knows Shadow’s right and he hates it.

“What difference does any of this make?” Shadow questions with a forlorn look, “Shadow the Hedgehog already tried to obliterate the planet once and you forgave him.”

Sonic collapses onto his back and stares up at the stone ceiling, “When you’re right you’re right, Shads.” Sonic kicks his legs out and hops onto his feet in one swift motion. He stretches his arms and rolls his shoulders before holding his hand out to the ebony hero. “Alright. Let’s do this before I chicken out again,” Sonic states with a forced smile.

Shadow smiles up at him like he’s proud of the change in demeanor and takes Sonic’s hand, allowing him to help him onto his feet.

They walk hand-in-hand back to the room Knuckles is in. Knuckles looks pleasantly surprised by just how short he had to wait. He doesn’t say anything though. He just leads the way down the corridor, allowing Shadow to comfort Sonic as they do so. Normally, Knuckles would totally call Sonic out on this, but he can tell the guy is freaked out about this. And if he’s honest with himself, he’s a little freaked out too.

The room they enter is pitch black, but Shadow can see the generator in the middle of the room being illuminated by Tikal’s spirit. He squeezes Sonic’s hand once before letting it slide away. He makes his way over to the orb and places his palm against it.

The room illuminates through the cracks of stone. It travels out from the generator like green lava seeping outward. As the lights move up the wall in front of them, a mural comes to life. The lights outline the form of Iblis, but to all of their surprise, Chaos is also there. The two beasts are fighting one another. As the last line comes into view, the green light turns red all around them.

Tikal’s spirit floats up to the mural and her body morphs back into her original form. Her feet slowly meet the ground as her fingers lace together. Her voice comes out sad and serious as she explains, “When the universe was new... there were two ancient colossal titans that waged war. One sought control and the other chaos. Iblis’ unchecked rage decimated everything he touched. Chaos’ mighty waters kept Iblis in check. As the two titans fought, Iblis’ body began to cool and harden into land and Chaos’ body super heated into the air and atmosphere. That is how this planet was formed.”

“Although, the two titans came up with a truce, they did not want anything to do with one another. Chaos ruled the land of the sky where his atmosphere kept the islands afloat high above the earth’s crust. Iblis ruled the land of darkness. The earth’s surface that was charred with fire and poisoned by noxious gases.”

“These two lands seem to be places that one would not expect life to thrive, but life always finds a way. Life adapted and evolved. The echidnas thrived in the land of the sky and were called angels because they could travel along Chaos’ wind currents from island-to-island. In the land of darkness, rising from Iblis’ ashes, were black creatures called demons. They were heavily armored creatures that could survive the extreme conditions.”

“This temporary peace would not last though. One of Iblis’ followers revolted and caused an uprising. He dubbed himself Black Doom and lead the demons up to the land of the sky, destroying everything they could in their wake. Furious, Chaos acted immediately and traveled down into the land of darkness and fought Iblis once more, thinking it was Iblis’ order of attack.”

“What happened next, neither the angels nor demons could have predicted. They fought for so long

and with every ounce of their energy, but they were evenly matched. Iblis' flame cooled down to a small ember and Chaos dissipated into a puddle. The two took on drastically different forms after the battle was over and declared a different kind of truce. The land of the sky and the land of darkness would live in harmony with one another. Iblis and Chaos decided to rule together as one."

Shadow gazes up at the mural and then back down at Tikal, "That isn't the end of the story though, is it?"

She slowly turns to him and gives him a smile, "No, it's not." The echidna girl makes her way back to the generator and takes Shadow's hand, placing it back onto the orb, "I think it would be best if I just showed you."

The orb shines blue and the walls around them turn into a projection of the past. It's the Sky Sanctuary when it was new and lively. Atop the highest tower, Chaos is gazing out at his land with a smile. His form is very similar to Sonic's, but his body is translucent as if made of water and his eyes shine like radiant emeralds.

Chaos gasps when he sees a flower being presented to him and looks down over the balcony. His smile softens when he sees Iblis hanging from the vines. He backs up a bit and lets Iblis hover up to the balcony with the use of his flames.

Iblis is similar in form as Shadow, but his body is made of ash and the red stripes are red flames instead. He sits atop the railing of the balcony in front of Chaos and tucks the flower behind his ear. "Your rivers and streams have been pouring down upon the land of darkness and something marvelous has happened," Iblis explains.

Chaos seems thoroughly interested as he rests his hands on his cheeks, "Tell me."

"These flowers have sprouted," Iblis states, "They thrive off the noxious gases below as well. I thought vegetation had long since died down there."

"I guess, it's something we've created together," Chaos says.

"One of many," Iblis replies as he gazes out at the blue sky, "If by accident."

"Isn't that the exciting part though," Chaos goes on with a blissful smile, "It's the surprise of what arises out of thin air."

"Yes," Iblis nods as he feels himself getting lost in Chaos' eyes. He lifts his hand, but shies away at the last moment.

"Go ahead," Chaos murmurs to him, "I used to hate your touch, but it's soften over the years. It makes me feel weightless and free now."

Iblis hums in agreement and whispers as he runs a hand across Chaos' cheek, "And yours cools me and grounds me back to reality."

Chaos closes his eyes to fully enjoy his touch. It boils at his soul and makes him feels lighter. He slowly opens his eyes to meet Iblis' and smiles when he feels Iblis' heat intensify just by his gaze alone.

"I want to submerge my being into your depths," Iblis murmurs with a smirk.

Chaos shies back and lets Iblis' hand fall. He snickers and looks away with embarrassment, "Stop it."

"I only speak the truth," Iblis states as he leans in closer.

"I apologize for interrupting you, Your Majesty, but may I have a word?" One of the echidnas speaks as they bow to Chaos.

Iblis can feel the flames surging through his body and flickering through his red stripes, "It's very rude to come to your king unannounced."

The echidna bows once more a bit fearfully, "I-I'm sorry. I didn't mean to..."

"Easy," Chaos says softly, "It's alright. I have time."

Iblis places his hand on Chaos' shoulder and glares down at them, "Do not let your people walk all over you. It could cause an uprising."

Chaos sighs and frowns, "Just breathe." He places a hand on Iblis' forehead and watches the flames die down a bit, "I requested this. I just like to know what's going on in my kingdom."

Iblis reaches his hand out and watches Chaos retreat back inside. He lets him go because it's his request. This does not stop him from standing in the doorway and observing.

There are a group of echidnas standing before Chaos. They all bow except for the one in the middle. Chaos bows back regardless and Iblis feels the heat in his chest intensify. He despises how Chaos bows back to his people. He is the ruler. He is immortal. He is better than any of them, yet he still bows.

"You seem tense," Chaos points out to the echidna who is glaring at him with powerful violet eyes.

"You'll have to excuse my anger, my king, but I had just gotten back from Angel Island where a hoard of demons tried attacking our land," the echidna speaks through clenched teeth.

"Angel Island..." Chaos repeats thoughtfully. That island was the smallest, yet highest island in their sky. It was hard to imagine how they could even reach that height.

"You," the echidna turns to Iblis who is standing in on their conversation, "Why are you not in the land of darkness? Why are you not governing your people?"

Iblis' stare sharpens as he makes his way over to the echidna, "First of all, I have a name and you will address me as such. Secondly, you will *bow* to your king. Thirdly, those demons you speak of are not govern by me. Do not associate the Black Arms with me or my people."

"I only pay my respects to kings that pay mine! In fact, since neither of you are properly governing your kingdoms, you two should bow to *me*! I am keeping your lands safe! Not you!" The echidna shouts back with anger as the group beside him bow lower, cowering in fear.

This strikes a sour chord in Iblis' chest. Especially since those similar words were thrown at him by his own people before they revolted. He will not let the same happen to Chaos' kingdom. He stomps his foot down as his body becomes ablaze, "How *dare* you! We are the only reason you exist! We are the reason you have air to breathe and land under your feet! We're the only reason you have blood in your veins and electrical currents keeping your hearts beating! We can just as easily take those away!"

The other echidnas cower lower and whimper in fear. The violet eyed warrior stands his ground, unmoving still. He snarls and states, "My allegiance lies with my king, not in you. I couldn't fathom following a ruler who cannot even control his own kingdom." The warrior turns away from Iblis like



he doesn't exist and locks eyes with Chaos.

Chaos takes a step forward and places a hand on Iblis' heaving back. It takes a moment, but Iblis' flames do dull down. Chaos sends a smile to the echidna and explains, "Please, keep in mind that we declared a truce. Iblis and I rule both the land of the sky and darkness as one."

The violet eyed warrior just laughs and shakes his head, "You can't even enter the land of darkness outside of your perfect form and Iblis is never down there anymore. That place is a lost cause."

Iblis goes to open his mouth, but Chaos places his hand on his shoulder. He doesn't get to utter a word as he feel the cool wave of energy wash over him.

"Everything relies on a perfect balance. The land of the sky would not exist without Iblis and the land of darkness would not exist without me. My atmosphere prevents the poisonous gases from rising to our land and Iblis' earth provides land for us to live upon," Chaos explains calmly, "We can't have one without the other. We need to stop excluding each other and start working together."

"Yeah?" The warrior asks with a huff, "And what of the grave imbalance of power between immortals and mortals?"

Chaos is at a loss for words this time.

"What do you mean?" Iblis asks as if it were a looming threat.

"Mortals have to rely on you two to keep everything together, yet you clearly cannot do so alone," the warrior states.

"And... What do you propose?" Chaos asks carefully.

"You provide us with some of your power so we can deal with threats that arise in your absence," the echidna declares.

"That's absurd," Iblis growls out, "We are not allowing mere mortals to possess powers of two gods."

"W-wait, hold on," Chaos begins.

Iblis doesn't even give him the chance, "You aren't *actually* considering it!"

"Well..." Chaos says a bit sheepishly, "He does kind of have a point. There is an imbalance of power, right?"

"No," Iblis grits out and turns to the echidna, "You want our power? I will kill you first!"

The other echidnas run away in fear, yet the violet eyed warrior stands tall.

Chaos swoops in quickly and guides Iblis away from the warrior. He gives the echidna a wave and proclaims, "We'll speak of this in private and I'll give you my answer in three days!"

"Very well," the warrior states as he finally bows and takes his leave.

As they get behind closed doors, Chaos lets out a sigh of relief. He makes his way over to his throne and sits on it heavily like he's exhausted, "I know I'm immortal, but it felt like that took ten years off my life!"

Iblis just glares at the closed doors as if he were still staring at the echidna. He tries to compose the

anger as he states, “You cannot be serious about all of this.”

“Well,” Chaos starts to say as he waves his hand in the air, “It might take a weight off our shoulders actually.”

“We *are* immortal,” Iblis points out before turning to him, “but we can still be *killed*. Do not forget that.”

Chaos looks down and frowns, sinking lower in his seat, “I haven’t forgotten.”

“Please,” Iblis begs, “Please, do not do this.”

“Wow,” Chaos snickers, “Are you actually groveling?”

“Would that please you?” Iblis asks, staring at Chaos with intense eyes.

“Easy!” Chaos holds his hands up, “I jest!”

Iblis bows his head, but a pained look strikes his face. He gets down on his knees and speaks, “Please Chaos... I bend to no one, but I will bow to you now. I will call you my king. Just please, I beg of you. Do not go through with this request. I cannot bare to see the outcome.”

Chaos just sits there stunned. Iblis is prideful and unmoving to anyone. So, this is more than shocking. Chaos sits upright again and waves his hand toward him, “Come here.”

Iblis gets back to his feet and makes his way to the throne. Instead of taking a seat by his side, he gets back on his knees and takes Chaos’ hands into his own. He gazes up at those radiant emerald eyes and whispers, “I value your life above all, my love.”

Chaos feels his core boiling from Iblis’ fiery eyes and he frowns, “Stop.”

“No, my king,” Iblis murmurs and presses his forehead to Chaos’ hands, “My beloved, please...”

“Get up, Iblis,” Chaos says, “This isn’t like you.”

“I will do as you say,” Iblis pleads roughly, “if you promise me!”

“Calm yourself,” Chaos murmurs as he slides his hand down Iblis’ face, “Let’s just talk this out.”

Iblis leans into the other’s hand. He doesn’t get up from the ground, rather he turns himself so he’s sitting at the foot of the throne. He leans his head against Chaos’ thigh with his hand still in his. “Speak,” is all Iblis can bare to say.

“This might be a good thing,” Chaos starts to say even though he feels Iblis twitch from it, “Our powers balance each other out anyway. If someone were to use your power, they could use mine to negate it.”

“Or they could use my power and destroy everything we’ve built,” Iblis replies with a frown, “I do not trust mortals. They’re selfish and hateful. They are not worth my time. They are not deserving of such power either.”

“I know that your people have tried to overthrow your rule and I’m very sorry for that, but mine have not shown any signs of rebelling. I trust them to do the right thing,” Chaos explains lightly.

“Mortals are mortals. They’re all the same. Their limited time on this planet makes them desperate and greedy. If they get one taste of our power, they’ll want more and more,” Iblis responds with a

snarl, "It does not make a difference if they are angel or demon. They are the same. Just because they haven't been caught doing it, does not mean those ideals don't lay dormant in their minds."

"I don't think it's fair to punish them for something they haven't done yet," Chaos says softly.

"Fair?" Iblis lifts his head momentarily to lock eyes with Chaos, "Do you seriously think they care about fair? They will lie and cheat and do whatever it takes to get what they want. They will even try to play off their lies and proclaim it as being just! They will make any excuse to get what they want. Do not be fooled by them."

"Iblis..." Chaos whispers and guides his head up.

Iblis follows and rises at the other's touch. He allows Chaos' arms to pull him in and he climbs halfway onto the throne with him. He looks down at Chaos' eyes and slowly closes his own before leaning in, capturing his lips with his.

Their lips slide together and apart and together again. Chaos whispers between kisses, "Please, let go of the hatred in your heart."

Iblis leans in once more to silence Chaos' voice. He pulls back a moment later and growls, "I will not forget the war those mortals started between us."

Chaos' hands slide up Iblis' back, dousing the flames spreading there, "It brought us closer together."

Iblis seethes like he hates that he's right and presses his forehead against Chaos', "Is this truly what you desire?"

"It's less about what I want and more about what this planet needs," Chaos replies with a smile.

"Fine. As you wish," Iblis nods in agreement, but can't fight the sadness on his face, "but do not forget me, my love. Do not forget my words."

"I won't," Chaos embraces Iblis as their body heat evens out to a tepid equilibrium, "Your warning is quite flattering, but everything will be fine. You'll see." He gestures to the throne next to him and smirks, "Now, sit beside me. You *are* my equal after all."

Iblis silently obeys and pulls himself away. He takes a seat on the throne next to Chaos and looks away with a frown. His eyes widen when he feels the other's hand on his and he hides the smile that's spreading across his face against the back of his hand.

Three days come and go and the echidna returns much like he had before.

He stands before the two kings and does bow to them properly this time, "Have you thought about my offer?"

Chaos steps forward and nods, "We have."

The echidna exchanges a look with Iblis before asking, "Well?"

Iblis knits his brow together before stepping forward with Chaos, "We accept."

The echidna looks pleased and gets back to his feet, "Thank you, Your Majesties."

The only one not looking pleased is Iblis, but he holds his tongue. He just follows the two as they travel to Angel Island. The echidna guides them up the steps of the altar and the two gods stand in the center.

“There’s one catch to this,” Chaos states a bit sternly.

“Anything, my king,” the echidna replies.

Chaos motions for the echidna to come to him and watches as he obeys. Chaos places a hand on his chest and watches as it glows green. He presses his palm to the echidna’s head and whispers, “You will be the guardian of this power and you are to guard it from evil for the rest of your life. This is your request and our sacrifice for the greater good.”

The warrior closes his eyes and feels the small burst of energy enter his body. As the glow subsides, he opens his eyes again and states, “You have my word. Your power will never fall into the wrong hands. I swear.”

Chaos smiles back to him, “I believe you.” He turns to Iblis and put on a brave face, “Are you ready?”

“For this? Never,” Iblis states, but turns to him regardless, “I will do it for you and you alone.”

Chaos just smiles wider at him. He places his thumb to his chest and watches as Iblis place his own thumb to his forehead. Chaos presses his thumb to Iblis’ chest and watches the white flame bloom from the spot he touched. Iblis presses his thumb to Chaos’ head and the spot warms to a red glow.

“Power is enriched by the heart,” Iblis whispers lowly.

“And thoughts can be turned into power,” Chaos says back.

They both turn back toward the center of the altar. Chaos’ body glows blue and Iblis’ glows yellow. They hold their hands out and let their powers combine and form into a solid mass. The energy swirls and fights each other like waves and flames crashing together. It subsides though and the energy evens out to an emerald green.

Chaos looks up at the echidna and states, “You must contain the power.”

The echidna steps forward and nods as he holds his arms out. The shell of a gemstone forms around the energy. He holds it together until the energy starts to fight and crash again. “What’s happening?” The warrior asks.

Chaos looks confused as he watches, but turns to Iblis.

Iblis is holding his head and trying to control himself. The power is too much to hold onto. He’s trying to keep it level, but it won’t stop fighting. He falls to his knees and cries out in agony.

The large emerald becomes unstable, burning bright with colorful lights. The emerald shatters apart as the enormous power is released.

Chaos kneels next to Iblis and places a hand to his shoulder, “Are you okay?”

Iblis just shakes his head, “I was unable to control it. I’m sorry, I couldn’t…”

“No, look,” Chaos tells him with a smile.

Iblis glances up and sees the pieces that broke off from the larger emerald. Seven colorful gems float around the larger one. “How do we make it whole again?” Iblis questions.

Chaos helps him back up and smiles brighter, “We don’t. This is perfect.”

“What do you mean?” Iblis asks.

“Your power is so strong not one person needs all of it. This way it can be divided up evenly and it will be harder to fall into the wrong hands,” Chaos explains with delight, “This separation will act as a natural inhibitor for your power.”

Iblis still looks wary though, “But... What of when they’re gathered together in one place?”

“Yes... What of that, Chaos,” A deep voice asks with a menacing laugh. Doom’s eyes float up from behind them and the projection of Black Doom shines before them.

Chaos just smirks up at him, “Then, I stop it. I am the controller after all.”

“Yes, you are,” Black Doom nods in agreement.

Chaos places his hand on the larger emerald and speaks, “The servers are the seven Chaos. Chaos is power. Power enriched by the heart. The controller is the one that unifies the Chaos.” Just as the last word it uttered though, one of the black creatures stalks up behind him and pushes its arm through Chaos’ liquid body. It reaches deeper and deeper until its claw grasps the beating green gemstone in his chest.

“Chaos!!!” Iblis shouts out, trying to get his bearings long enough to stop it from happening. It’s too late though. He watches in horror as Chaos’ heart gets ripped out of his chest. He cries out in anguish and tries to hold him, but Chaos’ body is nothing but formless liquid as it trickles through Iblis’ fingertips.

Black Doom’s projection dissipates and his actual form comes into view. His eyes look down at Iblis and comments, “Pathetic. Desperately seeking control has been your undoing, Iblis. You can blame your people for their rebellion, but it was you that caused it.” He turns to the echidna and states, “And it was your own paranoia that caused the falling of your king. I knew it would only take a few troops to cause you to strike a deal with your gods.” Black Doom holds his hands out as the seven emeralds float around him. He initiates Chaos Control and a large black comet appears over the floating islands, “Thanks to you, I was able to use Iblis’ power to warp my armada through Chaos’ atmosphere. The annihilation of your puny race starts now.”

“No... That wasn’t,” the echidna states in disbelief.

“You,” Iblis grits out as he glares down at the echidna, “*You caused this!*”

“N-no, I just... I was just trying to...” the echidna holds his hands up like he’s innocent.

“You do not have your god to stop me any longer. I will bring judgment onto you. You will *pay* for what you’ve done to Chaos,” Iblis speaks, feeling the flames of his own ferocity climb up his throat as he step-by-step makes his way over to the echidna, singeing the ground as he does so.

The warrior makes his way backward until his foot meets the first step of the altar, “No, it wasn’t me. It was Black Doom and his troops. I was just...”

Iblis digs his fingers into the echidna’s chest as his flames burn and singe, holding the traitor over his head. He watches the warrior struggle, reveling in his pain before letting his power become concentrated in his fist, “I will never forgive you for what you’ve done!” He sends a punch to his face so hard that it breaks open the rift of time and space, flinging the echidna into a different timeline entirely.

Iblis seethes with rage, his revenge nowhere near complete. He turns to Black Doom as his entire

body engulfs in flames, “Your actions will not go unpunished!”

Black Doom states, “I believe you unjustly punished your people long enough.” He holds the green gem above his head and lets out a laugh, “Go ahead. Fill yourself with rage. Make yourself more powerful. I still control you. You are mine now.”

“*You belong to me!* Not the other way around! Without me you wouldn’t be—“ Iblis begins to shout, but stops when he feels the splitting pain in his head. Chaos’ soul. It’s connected to him. Chaos is the only one who has control over him, but now that he’s gone... Iblis struggles to make his way back over to the large emerald and places his hands on it. “Chaos... Please,” Iblis says weakly, feeling his core burning brighter.

“Beg all you want,” Black Doom says with amusement, “I am your god now, Iblis.”

“I know you can hear me,” Iblis manages to whisper, “Please, seal my power away.”

There’s a soft sound of rippling water. It forms and morphs into a body on top of the large emerald. Chaos is no longer defined, but a vague image of what he used to be. He has no soul anymore. Just a formless body.

Black Doom gazes down at the beast and shakes his head, “Impossible.”

Iblis smiles up at the creature sadly and lifts his hand to his forehead. His fingers dig deep into his skull before pulling out a red jewel, letting his body dissipate into flames.

“No!” Black Doom shouts angrily, “I control you!”

“You will never have me,” Iblis’ voice echoes outward, “I only bend to Chaos’ will.”

Chaos lifts his hands above his head as the flames shoot out into the emeralds, his energy blasting through Black Doom’s form. Black Doom lands onto the altar and weakly lifts his hand to grab the red jewel as he calls out to his troops, “Fall back. We will have our revenge. Even if it takes a lifetime. The Black Arms will rise again.”

Chaos cries out angrily as Iblis’ power flows inside him. The large emerald shatters into pieces as the water god morphs into its large perfect form. Before his water can reach Black Doom though, he retreats onto his Black Comet unable to return to the land of darkness. So instead, he retreats with his army out into the dark recesses of space.

In Chaos’ sadness and despair, the floating islands fall through the atmosphere. The echidnas fear for their lives because once they reach the planet’s surface, they would surely suffocate and die. Except when they crash, there is water that had spilled from the islands to the surface and lush vegetation is all around them. The plants and flowers had taken the noxious gas of the air and transformed it into clean oxygen. They were safe. For the time being.

One island did remain in the sky though, just below the atmosphere. It was Angel Island where the emeralds have gathered once more. Chaos’ waters flow from the tiny piece of land for centuries as the water creature drowns in his own sorrow over what had happened. Much like most wounds though, time heals them. Chaos’ soulless body resides around the altar, destined to protect the emeralds. He became their guardian. The emeralds Iblis was sealed inside were Chaos’. They became known as the Chaos Emeralds and the large center piece was the Master Emerald that controlled them.

The imagery fades back into the stone of the temple where the mural of Chaos and Iblis still stands before them. Tikal’s hand is no longer on the generator as she gazes up at the mural with sad eyes.

“I saw the island finally float down to the surface and I went there. Chaos allowed me to stand before him and he was a kind and gentle god. Who was also looking after creatures called chao,” Tikal explains with a small smile, “I guess, Chaos and Iblis were able to create one last thing together. If by accident.” Her face turns grim though as she continues, “but when my father found out about the Chaos Emeralds... He wanted to use their power. Chaos was still very protective over them and, well...” She sighs and turns to them, “I suppose you know what happened after that.”

“Thank you,” Shadow says graciously, “For showing us.”

Tikal just smiles back to him, “No, thank you. It’s good to know you’ve returned to the world with a better life. I’m just sorry you had to see it.”

“I’d rather know,” Shadow responds.

Tikal nods to him before letting her body dissolve in the air, “Good-bye for now.”

The area becomes dark again expect for the generator in the middle of the room. Shadow looks over at Knuckles and Knuckles looks back. They both go to open their mouths before stopping themselves.

“No, go on,” Shadow urges him.

Knuckles looks away a bit embarrassed, “Sorry... for...” He shakes his head and frowns, “Man, I thought the gods chose me to guard the Master Emerald this whole time. I didn’t realize I betrayed Chaos.” He snickers a little, “And got punched through time. Literally.”

“Don’t feel any guilt toward it,” Shadow assure him, “It was Iblis’ own hatred and distrust of mortals that sparked the flame.”

Knuckles shrugs and looks away, “I guess we all had a hand in what happened.”

Shadow makes a thoughtful noise before murmuring, “It’s a lot to take in knowing I’ve had multiple past lives. One being that of a god.”

“Yeah,” Knuckles nods, “That, and knowing I’m able to sense the Master Emerald all because Sonic’s past-self blessed me with his power. Right Sonic?” Knuckles turns to where the blue hero once was, but when he doesn’t get a response he looks through the darkness in confusion, “Sonic? You there?”

Shadow sighs. Perhaps it wasn’t the best thing to do bringing Sonic here. Shadow lifts his hand from the generator and it dulls back down. He takes Knuckles by the arm and guides him back to the corridor where the torches are lit.

“Did he seriously bail again?” Knuckles grunts out.

“Looks that way,” Shadow says a bit dismissively.

When they walk out from the corridor to the next room, Sonic is still not present. They make their way back to the altar and Shadow notes how one of the Chaos Emeralds is missing. Shadow breathes a sigh of relief to that. At least he wasn’t somewhere within the ruins still.

Shadow turns to Knuckles, “If you grab the Master Emerald, I’ll use Chaos Control to bring us back to the Mystic Ruins.”

Knuckles agrees and they warp out of the temple.





## Just Scratching the Surface



### Chapter Twelve: Just Scratching the Surface

Shadow and Knuckles are transported in front of Tails' workshop and Shadow takes the lead in carrying the emeralds inside. Knuckles follows, lugging the Master Emerald with him.

As they enter the small building, Tails is leaning against the counter top with Sonic next to him as they're looking over some sketches. When Tails looks up, his face lights up and rushes over to them, "You got them up and running!? That's great!"

"Why'd you leave us back there?" Knuckles asks the hero gruffly.

"Oh, my bad. I finally got reception on my phone," Sonic explains cheekily, "My bro sent me a text telling me he was finished with the designs for Silver's shoes so I just *had* to see them."

Knuckles looks disappointed in him, "Shoes? Really?"

Shadow frowns. He's thinking that Sonic might be distracting himself from all of this and he doesn't want to take that away from him. So, he dumps the emeralds onto the counter and leans against it casually, "May I see?"

Knuckles just rolls his eyes, "I'll never understand you two." He places the Master Emerald on the sofa and takes a seat there.

Sonic spins the drawing around and snickers, "They'd look way cooler if they were red, but... ya know."

“They so wouldn’t, Sonic,” Tails remarks with a laugh. He leans over the counter with his brother and begins pointing out the various different benefits, “So, since you two wanted something safe I took the liberty of covering all the bases. It’s waterproof, fire resistant, puncture resistant, oil resistant... The inside is completely insulated it’ll keep him warm in the cold. There’s a rubber sole with a heel for resistance to electrical currents. It has a steel toe and it’s relatively easy to hook the inhibitors off and on from the lip.” He leans in closer to Sonic and points at the small red piece in the middle, “And just so my bro isn’t butt hurt about losing to me in Rock, Paper, Scissors I added red reflectors on the fronts that will aid in visibility. There will be micro-prisms built in them so you’ll have a full 180 view of the reflectors at all time.”

“As much as I appreciate the creative incorporation of red in the reflectors, why would he need them considering he’ll constantly be glowing due to the chaos energy in his inhibitors,” Shadow speculates to Tails.

Sonic opens his mouth to respond, “Oh, because blue is the hardest color to see. Especially through fog. It’s the same kind of reflectors that put on racecars. The lights from the stadium bounce off the them to give the drivers a higher visibility. Racecars don’t have headlights either because the white lights would be too blindingly bright and become more of a distraction than anything else. It would completely defeat the purpose.”

Shadow kind of looks at Sonic a bit speechless when he hears the words pouring out of his mouth. Even Knuckles kind of sneaks his head from over the couch to make sure it’s actually Sonic saying that and not Tails.

“Uh...” Sonic’s eyes dart around before zipping over to the fridge, “I’m thirsty! Is anyone else thirsty?! I want some lemonade! Who wants some lemonade?!”

“You’re nerd is showing, big bro,” Tails responds with a snicker.

“It so isn’t!” Sonic shouts as he kicks the refrigerator closed with his foot. He looks down at himself as if to make sure before repeating, “It *so* isn’t!”

Shadow finds himself smiling a bit as he looks down at the sketches, “These look really good. Is there any way to copy them so I can put them on file.”

Tails turns his attention back to Shadow and Sonic deflates a little, happy the attention is off him now. “If you had a phone, I’d probably be able to send it to you no problem,” Tails states.

“Just send it my way,” Sonic replies, “Or ya know, pull the old printer out because Shadow has a filing cabinet at home.”

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you were mocking me,” Shadow shoots back with a wicked smirk, “That isn’t a wise thing to do since it was I who purposefully deviated the spotlight away from your little outburst.”

Sonic just looks away with a blush on his face and coughs.

“Don’t worry. I’ll go hook the printer up,” Tails gets up with a groan like he doesn’t want anything to do with the start of a possible flirting standoff.

“Oh, uh... Tails brought out the old photo albums for us,” Sonic states a bit too loudly like he’s trying to change the subject yet again.

“Oh yeah?” Knuckles asks like it’s peaked his interest, “Bring ‘em over. I wanna get a look at those. Haven’t seen them in years.”

“Ya know... When I said ‘us’, I kinda just meant...” Sonic starts to say as he wrinkles his nose.

“Nonsense,” Shadow states as he picks up them up off the kitchen table and heads over to the sofa, “I *must* know how you met this red jerk.”

Sonic blinks in confusion as he watches Shadow willingly make his way next to Knuckles, “I... uh... okay...” He walks over to the sofa and Knuckles removes the Master Emerald for him to sit down. Sonic gladly takes the seat by polevolting over the headrest and bouncing as his ass meets the cushions, “Well, I mean, it was a pretty rough introduction actually. I had just gotten the Chaos Emeralds for the first time and was testing out my moves. Me n’ Tails decided to go to the next island over when *BAM!*” Sonic smacks his fist into his hand in an overdramatic manner.

Shadow just looks at him in confusion as he takes a seat next to Sonic.

Knuckles sits back with a proud look on his face, “There’s a reason why my name is Knuckles. That’s literally the first thing Sonic saw when he met me.”

Sonic laughs a bit sheepishly, “Yeah, he clocked me so hard it knocked the emeralds out of my body.”

“Are you serious?” Shadow asks in disbelief.

“To be fair... I was still getting the hang of my super form back then,” Sonic snickers.

Tails returns, handing the successfully copied sketches over to Shadow and taking a seat on the floor in front of them, “Sonic was getting the handle of a lot of things back then. I was slowly helping him speak too. He gave me the nickname Tails because he couldn’t pronounce Miles Prower yet. And since we didn’t know Knuckles’ name, that’s what Sonic was calling him. He was all like, ‘What hit me?’ and I told him, ‘I believe it was a pair of knuckles.’ So, he thought that’s what his name was. When we met up with Knuckles later, turns out he couldn’t remember his name anyway so he just rolled with it.”

Shadow turns to Sonic and asks, “You couldn’t speak? How old were you?”

Sonic laughs nervously, “I uh... was about eight. I think... That’s what Tails guesstimated.”

Shadow gives him a concerned look.

“No, it’s cool. I was living in Green Hill before I met Tails. So, like... it totally wasn’t like I was holed up in a lab or somethin’. I just... didn’t have any speaking animal companions before I met Tails,” Sonic tries to explain to ease Shadow a bit.

“A... lab?” Tails asks like he doesn’t understand.

Sonic waves his hands frantically, “Nononono! I-I mean, like Shadow! I wasn’t in a lab like Shadow was!”

Shadow frowns and places a hand on Sonic’s shoulder, giving him a stern look.

Sonic looks away with a guilty expression as he rubs his neck.

“Is there something you wanna tell me, Sonic?” Tails asks with both confusion and distress.

“Sonic,” Shadow murmurs to him, “He’s your brother.”

As if giving him an out, Silver’s cries start up from the bedroom and Sonic pulls himself off the sofa

quickly.

Shadow just watches him leave.

Knuckles sighs and folds his arms across his chest, "There's a lotta stuff we've figured out in a very short amount of time. Granted, a lot of it was speculation, but I think it's safe to say it's been confirmed on our last outing."

Tails glances from Knuckles to Shadow and holds his eyes on Shadow before asking, "Is Sonic like you?"

"Sonic is..." Shadow takes a minute to collect his thoughts before finishing, "like me in a lot of ways... Yet very, very different."

"You two aren't going to get any older," Tails concludes with a frown, "are you?"

"No, we are not," Shadow confirms.

"I had a strange feeling about that," Tails whispers, "I just didn't want to consider that it was a possibility because I thought Sonic would have told me..."

"Sonic... He's going through a lot right now," Shadow whispers under his breath, "*Mentally*. I don't think he likes to burden others with it."

"Wow..." Tails frowns and rubs his arm, "It's... gunna be weird being Sonic's younger brother and then... his older brother later on."

"He will always be your older brother, Miles," Shadow responds with reassurance, "His physical appearance may not age, but his mind will mature with time."

Tails nods like he's starting to understand, "I see..."

"Are you upset with him?" Shadow asks with a hint of caution to his voice.

Tails lifts his arm and wipes a few stray tears from his eyes, taking a deep breath. He glances back at Shadow and offers a smile, "No, this is probably just as weird for him as it is for me. I'm sure once he got used to the idea he would have told me. So, I don't blame him. Especially since I know how much he hates when he sees others cry."

"Wow," Knuckles says with a smirk as he snags Tails and gives him a noogie, "You've really grown up. I remember first meeting you and you'd cry over every little thing."

Tails pushes Knuckles away and blushes, "Th-that's not true!"

Knuckles snickers, "Uh huh. *Sure*."

Shadow lets the two wrestle it out on the ground, to which Knuckles is totally winning, and looks over the photo albums. He smiles lightly down at the pictures. Almost every photo Sonic is in the guy is smiling and having a good time. He's very glad of that.

Shadow's eyes avert back up when he hears the bedroom door open once more. Sonic doesn't look at anyone as he carries baby Silver in his arms and takes a seat next to Shadow again. He exchanges a look with Shadow and the ebony hero wraps an arm around Sonic's shoulders for support.

Knuckles pulls Tails' head up from the ground where he's pinning him down playfully, "Tails has something he wants to say!"

Tails looks so embarrassed. He manages to get a good kick to Knuckles' gut before getting back to his feet. He takes Knuckles' seat on the couch and gives Sonic a confident stare, "Sonic, you're my big bro and that'll never change, okay? And I love you no matter what. Nothing, not even immortality is gunna change that. So, like... whatever you're thinkin' right now? Stop it. 'Cause nothing is gunna change between us."

Sonic looks a bit blown away by Tails' words and he tries not to lose it on the spot. He doesn't look his brother in the eyes, but he does place his hand on his head like he used to and says, "Thanks, bro. I... really needed to hear that."

"Of course," Tails responds with a cheer to his voice, "And you don't have to tell me anything until you're ready. You are who you are after all. Underneath all of that, we're still bros. It's not like we knew any of this stuff before." He holds his fist out for Sonic and adds, "Besides, it doesn't matter, right?"

Sonic finds himself smiling and bumps his fist with Tails, "Right." There's a weight lifted off his chest. One he didn't realize was as heavy as it was. He does feel bad about not telling Tails, but he's glad to have him because no matter what he still stood by him. He's very lucky to have such an understanding brother.

Silver begins to fuss in Sonic's arms and he tries to rock him. When it doesn't work, Tails suggests, "He's slept most of the time you've been gone. So, he could be hungry."

"Probably," Sonic states as he gets up and snags the backpack from the kitchen table, "I just hope he doesn't throw another fit like earlier." Just as Sonic is gathering his things together, Amy walks in the door with Blaze and is glaring at him. Sonic rolls his eyes, trying to prepare for this new batch of bullshit.

"Sonic, you have a lot of explaining to do," Amy states with a huff.

"Can this wait?" Sonic asks as he tries to balance Silver on his knee as he twists open a jar of his baby food, "Go like... look at some old photos or something. Scold me later. I'm busy."

Amy's eyes avert over to the photo album in Shadow's lap and she gasps loudly, "Oh my gosh! Where have these been!?" She hangs over the couch and snags one of the untouched albums and sifts through it, "Look how cute you were as a kid!"

Sonic just rolls his eyes. Although, he is grateful that her attention is elsewhere. He's so glad she gets distracted easily.

Knuckles pulls himself up and makes his way next to Amy, eying the pictures. He points to one of the photos and laughs, "Oh yeah, look at that. It's a little Amy Rose. I remember when your quills were spiky."

Amy fluffs her quills a bit and blushes, "That was before I knew what a hair straightener was."

Knuckles eyes the picture of Sonic suspiciously before looking over at Silver, "Hm..."

"What?" Sonic gives his friend a bland look as he tries to get the grumpy kid to eat.

"Doesn't... Silver look a bit thin for a baby?" Knuckles asks out loud.

Amy snickers, holding her hands to her mouth as she tries to stop herself.

"Knuckles..." Sonic says with a warning to his voice.

“Oh, no,” Tails begins to explain, “Silver is about an average weight. Sonic was just a really chubby kid.”

“Tails!!!” Sonic shouts accusingly as his face burns bright red.

“Oh yeah,” Knuckles states like it just dawned on him, “You were kind of a chunker, weren’t you?” Knuckles elbows Tails and jokes, “How were you even able to carry him while flying?”

“It wasn’t an easy feat,” Tails whispers back, but just loud enough for Sonic to hear, “He would eat chili dogs like they were going out of style back then.”

“Okay... First of all, chili dogs never go out of style,” Sonic states with a huff, “And second, I totally grew out of it.” While no one is looking, Sonic pokes at his stomach hoping that statement was true.

“Relax. We’re just teasing,” Tails replies with a sigh, “It’s not like you never tease us.”

Sonic probably wouldn’t mind if Shadow wasn’t in earshot. He just feels a little insecure. He’s gazing at the back of Shadow’s head like he’s trying to read him, but so far the dark hero has been silent and completely engrossed in the photo album. So much so that it doesn’t even seem like he’s paying attention to their conversation.

Just as he says that, Shadow folds the book closed and stands up. Sonic bites his lip and looks away as the dark hedgehog makes his way next to him. Sonic pretends like he doesn’t notice as he continues to guide more baby food into Silver’s little mouth.

Sonic flinches a little when Shadow leans in and kisses his temple. He glances up at Shadow like he’s afraid he’s giving him a disgusted look, but when he catches a glimpse of his face Shadow is giving him soft eyes and a warm smile. “S-so... You don’t think I’m...?” Sonic asks like he’s afraid to voice it.

Shadow smooths down Sonic’s quills in an assuring manner as he murmurs to him, “I’m very grateful one of us had a good childhood.”

Sonic’s head snaps up when he hears Shadow’s words and he locks eyes with him. He can see the sadness and turmoil stirring within them. It’s only a brief moment, but Sonic sees it and he feels a pang of guilt. If he would have known where Shadow was at the time, he would have saved him earlier and saved him the heartache later on. He just wished he knew.

The moment is gone though as Shadow gives Silver a stern look, “Do not give Sonic a hard time. Open up.”

Silver gives Shadow a stubborn look and turns away before opening his mouth.

Sonic snickers and spoon feeds the baby once more, a bit relieved that it’s easier this time around.

After awhile though, Silver stops wanting to open his mouth again despite Sonic’s efforts. Tears prick from his eyes and he begins crying and holding his head again.

Sonic deflates a little and sighs, “Oh no... Not this again.” He tries to hush the child and calls out to Amy, “Can you bring me the baby aspirin, Ames?”

Shadow gives the child a concerned look as his little fingers try to grasp at the pain in his head. Shadow presses his finger to the center of the child’s head and applies a small amount of pressure.

Silver stops briefly and tries to catch his breath.

“The pain seems to be coming from his forehead,” Shadow murmurs.

“Whoa. Really?” Sonic asks.

Amy rushes over to Sonic’s side with the small pill bottle and unscrewing it for him, “How many do you think he needs this time? One or two?”

Sonic holds his hand out to her, “Just one for right now.”

Silver winces again and swats Shadow’s hand away frantically before crying as loudly as his little vocal chords can muster. A low *boom* is heard like a rippling current being unleashed as the pill bottle, baby food jar, and spoon go flying backwards. The baby catches his breath before looking up at Sonic who is covered in baby food and begins laughing happily.

Sonic groans and wipes as much of the mashed peas away from his face as possible, “Well... At least he’s happy now.”

Shadow has an intense gaze on the child though. That almost sounded like a sonic boom, but the child wasn’t even moving. That and the currents hit only very specified targets instead of forcing everything back. He’s never seen anything like it.

Amy pats Sonic’s back and tries to give him a reassuring smile, “Maybe you should get cleaned up.” She pulls her hand away and cringes when she sees the slop on her hands.

Sonic hangs his head and stands up with the baby in his arms, “I’m goin’. I’m goin’.”

“I’ll get the mop,” Tails states in exasperation as he disappears into the broom closet.

Shadow feels a bit bad for how much abuse Tails’ home is getting ever since they’ve arrived. So, he leans down to pick up the now empty jar of baby food and the spoon. His chest seizes when he sees the baby spoon though. It’s completely bent backwards. It wouldn’t be that big of a deal, except this spoon isn’t plastic. Aside from the rubber end of it, it’s completely metal.

“Everything alright?” Tails asks as he returns with a mop and sees Shadow crouched down on the floor.

“Yes,” Shadow nods and tosses the jar and spoon into the waste bin. He moves aside for Tails so he can finish up. He can feel Blaze stalk up to him and he whispers to her, “You brought Silver here. What was that?”

“I don’t know specifics,” Blaze responds back, “but it would appear his powers are emerging.”

“This early?” Shadow grits out and glares at her like it’s her fault.

“He was built to combat Mephiles in the future,” Blaze tells him, “The sooner the better.”

“No,” Shadow shakes his head and pulls her to the side, “He cannot have these powers right now. He’s a child. He cannot control them.”

Blaze is unfazed by Shadow’s anger and guides him back like he’s nothing, “He is a bioweapon. Control isn’t a concern right now.”

“Of course it is,” Shadow slams his palm into the wall just behind her head, “If he can’t control it then...!” He doesn’t finish. He can only think back to how he was captured by GUN and put into stasis for being a threat. He can’t let that happen to Silver.

“Everything alright?” Amy asks carefully.

Shadow turns and sees that everyone, minus Sonic who is still occupying the bathroom, is staring at him. He pulls his arm away from the wall and glances down at the ground, “Y-yes... Everything is fine.”

Amy nods even though she doesn’t look like she’s convinced. She hooks an arm around Blaze and forces her toward the door, “We should *probably* get going.” She’s clearly trying to break up the tension before anything bad happens. Amy calls back to Tails before she leaves though, “I’ll stop by tomorrow morning and finish up the porch, ‘kay?”

“Alright, Amy. Take care!” Tails calls back with a wave as his focus goes back to moping the floor.

Knuckles looks around before sauntering to the door as well, “I uh... better get going too. Ya know how it is. I’m a busy guy.”

Tails snickers and leans against the mop handle, “Give Rouge a kiss for me.”

Knuckles’ face fumes red, “Y-you don’t know where I’m going!”

“It’s written all over your face, dude,” Tails responds with a sly look.

“Ya know, I miss when you were a sweet kid and not a snarky jerk,” Knuckles shoots back.

“What can I say? I learn from the best. Sonic *is* my big bro,” Tails snickers and goes back to minding his own business.

Knuckles walks out the door with his nose in the air without even saying good-bye.

The moment Knuckles leaves and it’s just Shadow and Tails, the fox looks up at him, “You’re worried about what happened.”

Shadow doesn’t say anything, but he feels like he doesn’t need to.

“Hey, it’s okay. It’s just a little mess. I’ll have it cleaned up in no time,” Tails reassures him.

“It always begins with small messes,” Shadow mumbles with knitted brows, “It’s what it escalates to that worries me.”

Tails gives him a confused look, but Shadow is already making his way into the bathroom so he doesn’t question it.

As Shadow walks into the bathroom, he looks down and sees Sonic in the tub with Silver in his lap. He raises an eyebrow at him when he sees that Sonic has lathered his quills upward with soap to make it look like he’s in his super form. Shadow leans against the sink and doesn’t even question it.

“It’s... not what it looks like?” Sonic says sheepishly.

“Seriously, Sonic... I have other concerns weighing heavier on my mind,” Shadow informs him, rubbing his temples like he has a headache.

“Like...” Sonic replies a bit nervously, “Me being a fat kid?”

“What?” Shadow’s eyes shoot open and he glares down at Sonic like he couldn’t even believe he just suggested that, “*No*, why would you even think that was a significant thought in my mind? Can you please stray the conversation away from you and your superficial insecurities for one moment



and be serious?"

Sonic shrinks down a little and looks away.

Shadow sighs, feeling the guilt eating at his chest. He unclasps his inhibitors one-by-one as he removes his shoes and gloves and clasping them back on before settling in the water with the two. He holds Sonic from behind and rests his chin to his shoulder before whispering, "I love you for your free spirit and charisma. Nothing more. So, get those trivial thoughts out of your head." He slides away so he can rest his forehead to Sonic's back before continuing, "If I'm honest with myself, I'm more so envious of the luxuries you've had. Not spiteful toward them."

"You don't have to tell me, but..." Sonic goes to say as he tries to crane his head back to look at Shadow, "What happened to you growing up? Ya know, if you didn't just magically come into existence."

"Very early memories are foggy," Shadow explains softly, "I do remember my first memory. It came to me shortly after I retrieved all of them three years back. Everything was tinted by green and I was in a capsule... floating in this liquid with these... tubes attached to my limbs. There was a group of scientists staring at me, but I couldn't see their eyes because their glasses were reflecting the light coming from my containment unit. Everything around me was alien and I felt so exposed. It was quite lonely as well."

"I'm sorry..." Sonic says with a frown to his voice.

"Don't be," Shadow shakes his head as he feels a sad smile cross his face, "It wasn't all bad. As I was observing the outside world, I noticed a very clever girl. I saw her sneaking around and memorizing the passwords to the doors. She would sneak in and visit me while the scientists were away. I remember the first time I laid eyes on her and she on me. She walked up to the capsule and placed her palm to glass. I looked down at my own limb and lifted it to hers. I could actually feel her body heat against the glass. I remember watching as our fingers lined up together and thinking that we weren't so different after all. That maybe there was a place where I could fit in to this strange world."

Sonic twists his body around so he and Silver are facing Shadow and offers him a smile, "And that girl was Maria, right?"

Shadow feels the corners of his mouth threaten a smile, "It was."

"She sounds like a trouble maker," Sonic points out with a laugh.

Shadow looks a bit exasperated when he answers, "Yes, she was. But what were they to do? That Ark. The mission. It was all for her. All run by Gerald with the funds from the government. I was not initially developed to become a weapon. I was created to find a cure for Maria."

"Really..." Sonic says slowly.

Shadow nods, "My body was unstable though. I stayed in captivity for a long time. It wasn't until Black Doom offered to help that I was released onto the ARK. I now know why he was so interested in me specifically... And I now know how he was able to recreate me with his DNA. All this time I thought the Black Arms were an alien race outside our solar system. I couldn't have been more wrong." He looks away with anger and continues, "After that point, I wasn't seen as the light of hope to cure an awful disease. I was the darkness that would smite every living thing in existence. After Black Doom got his hands in the project, that's when GUN was tipped off that I was a living weapon."

"I see," Sonic mumbles as he furrows his brow.

Shadow locks eyes with Sonic again and whispers a bit desperately to him, "What happens if Silver can't control his powers? What happens if GUN comes after him?"

Sonic looks Shadow over once before giving him a smile, "Then, we break 'im out. Duh."

Shadow looks taken aback, "What?"

"We go bust him out," Sonic repeats.

"It's not that simple, Sonic," Shadow snarls, "I work for GUN. You'll become a wanted criminal."

"Well," Sonic says thoughtfully as he thinks about what he'd do before continuing, "You'd probably keep your job at GUN and drop me hints. Ya know, telling me the weakness in the security... and then, I'd bust in, rescue Silver, and BAM! I'd also have a word with that commander guy and give him a piece of my mind before heading back to Green Hill or somethin'. Whether you wanna come with me is up to you, but... I'd probably meet up with you later when Silver learned to control his powers better and we'd be a happy family again."

"That sounds very unrealistic..." Shadow groans like it's even painful to fathom.

"Or maybe you should stop worryin' about stuff that hasn't even happened yet," Sonic says with a pout, "Can't we just take care of this stuff when it happens. How's that saying go? The one about curiosity?"

"Curiosity killed the cat?" Shadow asks more than says.

"Yeah! That one," Sonic responds with a smirk, "Stop killin' cats, Shadow!"

Shadow rolls his eyes.

"Now," Sonic states as he lathers his hands with soap, "Lemme do your quills so it looks like you're in your super form!"

Shadow just sits back and smirks at him, wondering how long it'll take Sonic to realize what he'd just said.

Sonic goes to lather Shadow's quills, but stops, "Oh wait. They're always like that."

Shadow lets a low laugh hum in his throat, "Yes."

"Why is that?" Sonic asks inquisitively.

"Probably because my body has an enormous amount of chaos energy inside it," Shadow theorizes with a shrug.

Sonic's eyes fall to Silver and wonders out loud, "What do you think Silver would look like? Ya know, in his super form?"

"I don't really want to fathom the thought of him ever having to use his super form," Shadow states grimly, "but... Since he is connected to me, my guess is that they would stay stationary."

"Okay, okay," Sonic holds his hands up and continues excitedly, "I hear what your sayin'. But level with me a second..." Sonic takes the two longer quills that are hanging down from Silver's head and flips them upwards. He doesn't even need to finish his sentence. He just turns Silver around for

Shadow to see and waggles his eyebrows. He holds Silver up by the armpits while playfully darting him around in the air like he's flying and making 'Nyrooom!' noises.

The kid is flailing his arms around while laughing hysterically and having the time of his life.

"Cute," Shadow says and the line between whether he's joking or not is very blurred. He folds his arms across his chest and asks, "Perhaps you should rinse off now before the water gets cold."

"Aw, you're no fun," Sonic says with a frown as he hands Silver over to him. He leans backwards and dunks the back of his head under the water. He rinses the soap out and when he sits back up his quills are hanging down like they normally do. He watches as Shadow delicately rinses Silver's head, making sure not to get any soap in his eyes. Sonic just leans his head against the tile and smiles at Shadow lovingly.

Shadow glances up at the hero for a moment before asking, "What?"

"I can't look at ya?" Sonic jokes.

"I suppose you can," Shadow states a bit embarrassed.

Sonic lets out a few small laughs before leaning in and kissing Shadow's lips. He stares at Shadow with hooded eyes before he's being guided back in. He lets Shadow's lips slide against his and apart and then together a bit deeper. Sonic murmurs against Shadow's lips, "Just want you to know that I woulda busted you out in a heartbeat if I'd known GUN had you. I woulda done it before crummy Egghead too. Give GUN an actual *reason* to come after me."

"The sentiment is nice," Shadow responds with a dark chuckle before kissing Sonic deeply again, "but perhaps it's best we leave those events behind us." Shadow pulls himself out of the water with Silver in his hands and grabs a towel.

"I'm being serious," Sonic pouts as he lifts the stopper on the drain.

"You're a hero, remember?" Shadow states as he begins to dry Silver off.

"Oh, I'd still be a hero," Sonic responds with a confident look, "You really think people would side with GUN if I tried to rescue my family? Besides, if GUN wants us they'll have to catch us first."

When Shadow sees Sonic step out of the tub, he tosses a towel at his head, "GUN gives me my paychecks. Now, be quiet and dry yourself off."

Sonic looks over the towel with a bored look and is about to duck and spin himself dry, but Shadow stops him. The hero gives Shadow a disgusted look and starts toweling himself off normally, "Alright. Geez. Gotta do it the old fashioned way."

"The others left," Shadow informs him with a reserved look.

"Yeah?" Sonic says as he just gets done with rubbing the towel against his quills, "Knux went to go bang his girl and Amy slithered back into the hole from whence she came?"

Shadow elbows Sonic gently, "Be nice to Miss Rose. It appears she's helped you quite a lot with the child raising aspects of our life."

"Ugh," Sonic throws his head back in disgust, "Stop being right, Shads."

Shadow balances Silver in one arm and wipes off Sonic's back with the other because he can see the

stray droplets dripping from his quills. “So...” Shadow begins to say, drawing out the word a bit.

“So... What?” Sonic asks, enjoying Shadow’s hand massaging his back.

“You left in quite the rush while we were at Glyphic Canyon,” Shadow states.

“Yeah?” Sonic says, his voice slowly getting more annoyed.

“Are you... alright?” Shadow asks.

“I will be if you don’t bring it up again,” Sonic states a bit grouchy.

“Sonic...” Shadow tries to turn the other around.

Sonic snaps back and steps away from Shadow, “You got what you wanted, dude. You got your answers. It’s done and over with. We can finally start living our lives again. Now, drop it.”

“There’s... a few things that don’t add up,” Shadow tries to say.

“Aw, man! Here we go! That’s the ‘I need the find the answers’ tone again,” Sonic spins around sharply and glares at him, “It’s clear as day! Eggman let some weird-o experiment go, it killed me, and he made a Shadow 2.0 to fix it! All we gotta do is keep an eye on old egghead and destroy Mephiles the first chance we get! There’s no more answers to look for!”

“But... My absence in the timeline... Mephiles wanting Iblis’ power... How Blaze fits into all of this...” Shadow begins to say.

“Enough, dude!” Sonic shouts and it startles Silver, causing him to cry. Sonic grits his teeth like he can’t stand it anymore. He begins shouting over Silver’s crying, “I don’t want all of this taking over our lives! I’m so tired of figuring out what happened in the past or what happens in the future! What about now? What about right now!? Are we gunna just keep worrying about it up until it happens? That isn’t how I wanna live my life, Shadow!!!”

Tails knocks on the door and asks quietly, “Is everything okay?”

“Yes!!!” Sonic shouts at the door.

“O-okay...” Tails mutters, backing away from the door.

“You need to calm yourself,” Shadow states sternly, “I understand this is a lot, but you need to...”

“Don’t tell me what I need to do,” Sonic seethes, “You and I? We’re on the same level. Stop acting like you know what’s best for me. I’m not a kid!”

Shadow stomps his foot down and gets in Sonic’s face, “Then, stop acting like one!”

Sonic’s face drops and he feels his veins run cold.

Shadow immediately regrets it the moment he sees Sonic’s face, “Wait, Sonic... I...”

Sonic shakes his head, “No, it’s cool. Peace, dude. I’m out.” He pushes past Shadow and stomps out of the bathroom.

Shadow follows after him through the living room, trying to get him to stop. His tone gets a little rougher when he repeats, “Sonic, *wait!*”

Sonic disappears behind his bedroom door and slams it shut.

Shadow goes to grasp the door handle and curses when it's locked. He could do a number of things. Break down the door or better yet warp inside, but he doesn't. "You *cannot* keep running from your problems like this," Shadow grits out. Shadow hears the lock click open and a flicker of hope burns in his chest.

Although, it's smothered out when Sonic noisily pushes the crib out of his room and slams the door shut again.

Shadow places his hand on the wood frame of the crib and hangs his head. He wants to swear so bad. He can feel the words itching at his throat, but he swallows them back when he looks down at Silver. Shadow closes his eyes and takes a minute before placing the crying child into the crib and carting it over to the couch.

Tails is leaning against the counter, having saw the whole thing, "Wow, that was petty."

"I don't need the commentary," Shadow murmurs as he runs his fingers through the flare of quills on the child's head to soothe him.

Tails just gives him an exasperated look as he rests his hand to his cheek, "Okay. Fair, but you don't need to put up with that either."

"I incorrectly chose my words," Shadow states lowly.

"No, they were right," Tails points out, "He just didn't wanna hear 'em."

"Miles," Shadow's voice is both irritated and pleading, "*Please*."

Tails holds his hands up in surrender. He sees that Shadow has enough he has to deal with right now. So, he lets it go. "Just wake me up before you leave tomorrow so I can take care of him," Tails states with a sigh.

"I will pay you," Shadow informs.

"What? No, it's cool," Tails tries to say.

"No, it's only fair. We've intruded on your home and you've been stuck taking care of Silver on multiple occasions," Shadow explains, "I will pay you tomorrow."

"If you want to," Tails says likes he's unsure. The moment he sees Shadow sit heavily on the couch though, he knows it's his time to leave. But he speaks before retreating back into his room, "And you guys aren't intruding. We're family. Okay?"

Shadow slides his hand away from his face to look up at Tails, but the fox is already gone. "Family," he whispers to himself. If he and Sonic were to get married that would be the case, wouldn't it?

# Back to the Future



## Chapter Thirteen: Back to the Future

As the morning sun hits Sonic's face, he unwillingly pulls himself out of bed. He looks over at where the crib would have been if he hadn't dragged it out last night. He's a little relieved he isn't waking up to screaming though. His head is still kind of pounding from Silver's temper tantrums yesterday.

Taking care of a kid was a lot harder than he initially thought. He thought it would be fun. That they'd hang out and he'd watch the kid grow and learn. He never considered that there would be bad days in the mix of it.

That, and Shadow... He doesn't even want to go into that mess.

Although, now that he sits and thinks about it with a full night's sleep, maybe he was overreacting. Maybe Shadow was right like he always is. Maybe he's just trying to prevent the worst from happening.

He doesn't really have to think much more on it because he makes his way out the door as he rubs the sleep out of his eyes. He goes to walk over to the crib, but notices Silver isn't inside.

"Over here," Tails calls over to him from the kitchen as he's feeding Silver who is in a highchair.

Shadow must have gone back home to grab a few things.

Sonic makes his way over to the fridge and pours himself a bowl of cereal before hopping onto the counter and making it a seat, "Thanks, bro."

“Of course,” Tails says with a smile.

Sonic jerks back when he sees Chocola pop into his vision and try to steal a bite of his cereal, “No, get outta here! What are you even doing here!?”

Tails laughs at the scene and explains, “Shadow went back home and brought him here so I can keep a close eye on him. Apparently, he went through your pantry while you’ve been away.”

Sonic watches the chao in horror, “You better not have eaten my frosted animal crackers, you Shadow wannabe!”

The chao gives him a wicked smirk.

“*YOU*,” Sonic snarls and grabs the chao, planting his ass right on top of him so he can’t move, “Shadow might be lenient on you, but my animal crackers will be avenged.”

“Sonic, you’re overreacting,” Tails says with a sigh.

Sonic grumbles and hops off the counter. He watches the chao scramble off and growl at him. Sonic sticks his tongue back at him, “Yeah. Whatever, ya creep.”

“I believe I saw Shadow leave you a few things over by the couch before he left,” Tails informs him.

“Oh good,” Sonic rolls his eyes and makes his way over to the living area. The first thing he notices right away is the electric guitar in the corner with an amplifier. He just sighs at it with a disappointed look, “Is this his way of apologizing? He can’t just buy me stuff and think things will *magically* be better.” He runs his finger down the fret board and notices that it’s really sleek and cool looking. It’s even red with intricate black stripes traveling down the body of it. Okay, maybe he’s a little wooed by it, but he’s not going to pick it up and try it out in front of Tails.

Sonic collapses into the couch and rests his feet on the coffee table. Just beside it is a fully cooked breakfast wrapped in saran wrap. If he was at home, he would have kicked it off the table and waited for Shadow to get home to clean it up. Instead, he balances the plate on his foot and grabs it with his hand, not even having to get up to snag it. He unwraps it and the pancakes are still warm and fluffy. He squints at them and hates how delicious they look. He’s totally not eating that.

He spins the plate around and sees some strips of bacon. He may or may not have eaten a few while Tails wasn’t looking. Okay, the breakfast was nice. He’s still mad at Shadow, but it was nice.

Sonic sees the book on the table and eyes it strangely. His curiosity gets the better of him and he does pull himself up this time. He puts the plate down and picks up the book. He wrinkles his nose at it. *Astrophysics*. Barf.

There’s a note sticking out of it though and Sonic opens the book to the page. His jaw drops when he sees three flowers pressed inside. A red one. A blue one. And a small white one in the middle. He holds the book with one hand and unfolds the note with his other.

It reads:

*Sonic,*

*You are right. I will not pursue this endless thread of knowledge any longer. I want to be here for you and Silver now. In the present. I have been neglecting my own duties as a life partner and a father and there is nothing childish about wanting me here for the two of you. The both of you are my world and I will do everything in my power to keep you two safe in our current timeline. It is also*

*unfair to you that I keep making promises that I don't intend on keeping. That's unacceptable. Please, take these gifts as a token of my gratitude for all you have done for me and Silver. I know that it is difficult to have to surrender your freedom for our new life, but I promise I will be there for you to make the transition easier.*

*From the bottom of my heart, I love you.*

*Shadow*

Sonic tries not to get misty eyed when he finishes reading. He jumps when he sees pressed flowers begin to pour into his lap from the pages of the book. He sifts through the pages and there are dozens and dozens of flowers inside.

Sonic hangs off the headrest of the couch and calls out, "Tails!?"

"Yeah?" Tails asks, although his tone suggests he already knows what Sonic is going to say.

"I'm a jerk," Sonic says in a defeated tone.

"A little bit," Tails snickers, "but I still love you."

Sonic drags his feet back over to his brother and asks, "Do you think it's too late to apologize? Do you think he'll forgive me?"

Tails just laughs loudly, "Dude, you're joking right? You have Shadow wrapped around your finger. I feel bad for the guy."

"Should I do something for him... or..." Sonic asks as he drapes himself across the kitchen table.

Tails snorts and laughs harder, "Uh... Yeah, you could act more mature."

"That sounds *haaaaaard*," Sonic whines.

"Clearly," Tails shakes his head.

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This is one of those special days when Shadow is afraid to clock out and he takes his sweet time leaving. He hates how Rouge immediately knows something's wrong too. Well, she probably would have been a bit more skeptical if Omega hadn't used his facial recognition software to notice something was off with him.

Now, Rouge is following him out the building and playing 21 questions.

As they get to the parking garage, Shadow finally has to tell her, "Sonic and I got into a fight and..."

Rouge's eyes veer off behind Shadow and she announces, "Hey, big blue!"

Shadow turns suddenly and his heart leaps in his throat when he sees Sonic splayed out across his bike.

"Hello, Rouge," Sonic replies with a whistle, "Lookin' lovely as ever."

She waves her hand and finds herself blushing, "Oh, stop it."

"Also, I ran into Knuckles on my way up," Sonic snickers, "You're welcome."



“Oh um...” Rouge looks away a little flustered, “Well, it looks like things have been patched up here. I’d better be going.” She waves them off and doesn’t even take the elevator down. She just flies off the side.

Shadow just lets out an exasperated noise and makes his way over to Sonic, “How did you know I brought my bike today?”

Sonic pulls out the yellow Chaos Emerald and spins it on his fingertip, “I might have gone back home and saw it wasn’t in the driveway. That, and you tend to like driving to work when you have a lot on your mind.”

Shadow watches Sonic leverage himself up and scoot back to give him enough room to sit. He climbs onto the bike and kicks the kickstand up. He feels Sonic’s hands slides up his chest and the action alone never ceases to get old. He glances over at the other from over his shoulder and asks, “So... I take it you’re no longer angry with me.”

“How could I?” Sonic asks as he nuzzles in closer, “That note literally ripped my heart out and tore me to pieces.”

Shadow jolts back and asks, “What!?”

Sonic pats his back and muffles his laughs against Shadow’s shoulder, “It pulled at my heartstrings, dude. It made me feel so guilty.”

“That wasn’t the intention,” Shadow states with concern.

“I know...” Sonic responds a bit softer and wraps his arms around him a bit tighter, “It just got me thinkin’. That’s all.”

“About?” Shadow questions.

“The future,” Sonic lets out a bitter laugh, “Nothing’s gunna change if we don’t take action.”

“Sonic, I didn’t mean...” Shadow starts to say.

“No, I’m not right about this. You are. You’re right about me running from my problems,” Sonic murmurs, “Running’s the only thing I’ve really been good at.”

Shadow lifts his hand to grab Sonic’s, “So, what do you propose?”

“We wanna know about the future so bad?” Sonic replies with a stern voice, “Why don’t we just nip it in the butt and go there?”

“How?” Shadow questions.

“Blaze came to this timeline with these things called Time Stones. We use ‘em, go into the future, see what happened, and prevent it from happening here,” Sonic retorts.

“I thought there was nothing left. I watched the Earth burn into nothing in my vision,” Shadow tells him.

“Yeah,” Sonic nods to him, “Nothing on *Earth* survived.”

A small gasp leaves Shadow’s mouth when he realizes what Sonic’s suggesting, “...The ARK.”

“Bingo,” Sonic snickers.

“Are you absolutely sure about this?” Shadow asks him.

“Nope,” Sonic says as he shakes his head, “but if that vision of the past was tryin’ to tell me something, it’s that sometimes I need to shut up and just listen to you.”

Shadow takes in a deep breath as if preparing for it himself, “Alright. Let’s get going.”

“Can we take the long way back?” Sonic asks a bit nervously, “I kinda wanna get a good look at our world right now before we have to see what this bleak future has in store for us.”

“Of course,” Shadow responds as he revs the engine and they take off.

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Amy wipes her brow after she nails the last board in place. “I think I’m done, Tails,” she says, projecting her voice toward the house, “Want to take a look?”

Tails makes his way out with Silver in his arms and inspects it. He applies pressure onto a few places before giving Amy a thumbs up, “It looks great! Better than it was before!”

Amy laughs sheepishly, “Nonsense. You’re just saying that.”

“I’d never lie about that,” Tails responds, “Especially with craftsmanship as good as this.”

“Aw, shucks! You’re gunna make me blush,” Amy says a bit embarrassed.

Blaze makes her way up to the small workshop and stops by Amy’s side, “Excuse me. I was told to meet Sonic here.”

“Oh uh...” Amy turns to Tails, “You know anything about that?”

Tails rolls his eyes, “Yeah, he went out to get Shadow ‘really fast.’ He’s the fastest thing alive, yet when he says he’s going to pick Shadow up from anywhere it usually takes a lifetime.”

“I see,” Blaze states, not even batting an eyelash at Tails’ joke, “I will wait here in the meantime.”

Amy exchanges a look with Tails and they both kind of shrug at each other. Amy hooks the hammer in the pocket of her overalls and turns her attention back to Blaze, “So, what kind of business do you have with Sonic? If you don’t mind me asking.”

Blaze looks her over and says, “I don’t see the harm since you are one of his comrades.” She shows Amy the two jewels in her hands, “These are the Time Stones. He requested I bring them so he and I can go into the future.”

Amy looks a bit concerned, “Isn’t that dangerous?”

Blaze nods, “It is, but I trust His Majesty... er, um... *Sonic*, as he requests me to call him in this timeline... I trust he has a good reason.”

“Oh,” Amy says with a frown, “What did you guys used to do in the future?”

“We fought a monster called Iblis,” Blaze responds as if it were the norm, “I used to follow his every command. That is... until he died.”

Amy gasps as her eyes widen. She turns to Tails and whispers to him, “Did you know about this?”

Tails just shrugs, “No, but at this point it wouldn’t surprise me. It’d explain why Sonic’s been acting weird.”

Amy glances back at Blaze and questions, “Why do you call Sonic ‘His Majesty?’ Is he like a king or something?”

“Sonic is a god,” Blaze states with a serious look, “He is the reincarnation of Chaos. Perhaps you’ve heard of him in this time period.”

“Oh, we’ve heard of him,” Amy confirms with her hands on her hips.

“And fought him,” Tails adds with a groan. He shakes his head, looking disappointed.

“What?” Blaze asks with heated anger, “Why would you fight Chaos? He is not evil. He is not like Iblis.”

“How can you be sure Iblis is evil either?” Amy asks pointedly, “Chaos tried to destroy the world too. His heart was just full of hatred and his actions were misguided.”

“What?” Blaze asks like she doesn’t understand Amy’s words.

“I’ve met plenty of creatures that people thought were evil, but they actually had a good heart,” Amy states matter-of-factly, “Just because someone is misunderstood doesn’t mean they’re evil.”

“B-but...” Blaze tries to retort.

Before another word is said, all three of their attentions are on the motorcycle that’s driving up. Shadow stops the bike right as he gets up the hill and the blue hero is waving at them, “Hey, guys!”

When the others turn to him, they don’t look happy.

Sonic shrinks behind Shadow and whispers, “Maybe they didn’t see us. We should try driving away.”

Shadow gets off the bike despite Sonic’s protests. If they were doing this thing, they were doing it now.

Amy gets in Sonic’s face and demands, “When were you going to tell me you were Chaos!? What is going on right now?”

Tails shrivels back a little, “A-Amy. Relax. Sonic has his reasons.”

Sonic looks shocked before glancing over at Blaze. He glares at her accusingly.

“Enough,” Shadow states as he takes Sonic by the hand and guides him away from the pink hedgehog. He makes his way over to Blaze and stares at her, “I’ve been informed you have the Time Stones. I need you to bring us back to your time period on the space colony ARK.”

Blaze just stares back at him and says, “I can’t do that.”

Sonic perks his head up and questions, “What? Why?”

“I don’t know where that is,” Blaze tells him, “I can only take you to places I have physically been.”

“Then, I will take us,” Shadow states sternly and holds his hand out.

Blaze looks Shadow over and scoffs, “What makes you think you could? Only I can summon the chaos energy to travel through time and space.”

Shadow’s eyes rest on the jewel on her head and then back into her eyes, “And where did you obtain that gemstone in your forehead?”

“It was bestowed upon me,” Blaze states proudly, “By the flames.”

“By the flames of Iblis,” Shadow grits out.

Sonic’s eyes shift back from Shadow to Blaze and takes a step backwards.

“Excuse me?” Blaze looks appalled by his words.

Amy pops in and snickers, “Let me guess. Iblis isn’t evil.”

Sonic rolls his eyes and shoves Amy’s face backwards.

“I am Iblis,” Shadow explains in a gruff tone, “I witnessed my former self remove that stone from his forehead. The one who bestowed that gem upon you was me.”

Amy throws her hands up in the air in defeat and begins to walk away with exasperation, “I’m not even going to ask anymore! I just expect a full power point presentation explaining everything sent to my email in a week!”

“Fine,” Blaze says as she hands over the gems to Shadow, “Prove it to me.”

“*Fine*,” Shadow responds as he takes them from her. Admittedly, he doesn’t know what he’s doing with them, but he knows he can somehow make it work. If they’re anything like the Chaos Emeralds he just has to transfer his thoughts into power. He closes his eyes and concentrates. Letting the memories of being on the ARK flow through his mind. He can almost recall the metallic sensation under his feet when he says, “Chaos Control!”

Shadow opens his eyes and it takes him a moment to realize that nothing happened.

Blaze just smirks at him, “I knew it.”

“W-wait! Hold on,” Sonic cuts in as he states, “Sure, you traveled through time, but you also had no idea you’d be traveling 200 years into the past.”

“I fail to see your point, sir,” Blaze responds.

Sonic holds his hand out to Shadow, “Lemme see the green one.”

Shadow glances down at it and then back up at Sonic, “Why... the green one?”

“Dude, shut up. You know this is colored coded,” Sonic replies a bit snarky and makes a hand gesture to him.

Shadow hands it over and watches Sonic take it.

Sonic holds his arm up and motions for Shadow to do the same. Their arms cross together and Sonic whispers to him, “I’ll think about the time. You think about the place.”

“That sounds like one of your awful pickup lines,” Shadow points out with a bland look.

“Yeah?” Sonic asks cheekily, “Should I use it on you later?”

“You don’t need to use pickup lines on me,” Shadow shoots back, “We’re engaged.”

Blaze looks between the two and asks, “What are you two doing?”

“They’re flirting,” Tails calls out from the porch, “I’d know. It’s really annoying.”

Shadow looks away embarrassed and mumbles, “Focus.”

Sonic’s smirk widens, “Oh, I’m sorry. Was I distracting you again?”

“Your Majesty!” Blaze shouts, “Is this any way to behave!? You came to me to aid you in your mission! Why are you wasting time and stalling!?”

“I’m... I’m not stalling,” Sonic swallows and darts his eyes back and forth.

Shadow just smirks at him.

Blaze covers her mouth when she realizes what she’s done. She gets on her knees and begs, “Please, Your Majesty! Forgive me for my transgressions.”

Sonic cringes a bit, “Chill, lady. It’s cool. I kinda deserved that.”

“Blaze,” Shadow grits out, “Get on your feet. Have some dignity. If you’re coming with us on this mission, you need to know one basic rule. We are all equals and no one gets left behind. Do I make myself clear?”

“Equal? To the king?” She asks a bit taken back.

“Yes,” Shadow nods, “You’re life is just as important as ours at this point. You traveled through time and brought us Silver. If it weren’t for you, we would not have a chance at changing our future. You are a vital member of this team.”

“Yikes,” Sonic frowns a bit, “Way to get all Alpha team leader on this.”

“No, you are right,” Blaze states as she rises to her feet, locking eyes with the dark hero, “Shadow, I will aid in your mission and I will stand as one with you.”

“Good,” Shadow responds before turning to Sonic, “Are you ready?”

“Born ready,” Sonic smirks back.

They hold the gems up once more, crossing their arms again. Shadow closes his eyes and lets his thoughts delve into his memories of the ARK. Sonic closes his eyes and can feel Shadow’s memories pouring into his mind. They simmer and dull down as he concentrates, trying to focus on the future. It’s hard because he’s never been there, but his mind falls back into his dream he had. The one he had forgotten. He can feel Chaos merging as one with his body, taking a hold of the Time Stone.

As if synced with one another, the two heroes hold up their arms higher and shout, “Chaos Control!”

There’s a spark of light as time and space are warped, creating a portal in front of them.

Blaze’s eyes light up when she sees it and looks at the two in awe, “It’s true. You two are...”

They both nod to her. Shadow stares into the portal and can see the reflection of what he's known of the ARK. Even with 200 years, not much seems to have changed. He supposes that's normal since it isn't like Earth. Always changing and evolving. The ARK is a skeleton of its own permanent design. He glances up at Sonic when he feels a warm hand around his. He takes in the other's encouraging smile and they both give the portal a confident look.

They jump through and their feet meet the cold, metal ground of the ARK. Blaze lands just behind them and the portal closes behind her.

Nothing seems different. It doesn't feel like they traveled through time, but only been transported to the ARK. That is, until Shadow makes his way over to the windows that gaze out into space. The familiar blue aura of the Earth he's memorized and fallen in love with is nothing but a ball of fire. It doesn't even look like a planet. Just a dying star.

Shadow places his hand onto the glass and watches it in disbelief.

"What are your orders?" Blaze asks sternly.

That knocks Shadow out of his stupor. Right. He needed to focus. He was preparing himself for this. He turns to her and says, "Our mission is to gain Intel. Anything that explains the cause of this hell hole of a future. The ARK has several computers set up, but since I don't know what the space colony is currently running on and what condition those computers are in, we're going to need to split up. We will meet back here in an hour." Shadow points down the hall on the far right, "The West corridor holds the research facilities. Blaze, you will search there."

Blaze nods to him, "Understood."

Shadow turns to Sonic and points down the hall on the far left, "The East corridor holds the laboratories. You will search there, Sonic."

"No problem," Sonic says with a smile.

Shadow points at the large hallway down the middle, "I will go down to the docking station and search there." He turns to both of them and explains, "Our only mission is gathering information. If you run into anything unusual you are to come back to this point immediately." His eyes fall onto Sonic and lowers his brow, "Understood?"

"Define... unusual," Sonic says slowly with a squeak to his voice.

Shadow's stare sharpens, "Don't. Touch. *Anything*... if you feel it is a viable threat. I want, you specifically, to come to *me* if you see anything that even remotely looks like me or it could be connected with me."

"So, like... badniks are all cool, right?" Sonic asks with an innocent smile.

Blaze turns to him and says, "I believe he's trying to say that if you are approached by Mephiles... run. To which, I agree."

"Running's what I do best!" Sonic calls out to them as he begins rushing down the hall.

Shadow sighs and heads off on his own as well. He just prays Sonic isn't going to do anything stupid while they're here.

# The Haunting Truth

## Chapter Notes

I figured I'd put a warning here. This chapter is a little intense. There's reference to suicide and a scene where a character is having a panic attack. So, this chapter isn't for people who are easily triggered. (I feel like sensitive ppl prob shouldn't be reading this story anyway. lmao)

I mean, there's been some pretty intense stuff up until this point and if you read that stuff this probably won't be all too bad.

It doesn't really show anything and it's not super gory. I just figured I'd just warn you guys. In my personal opinion it's not that bad, but... ya know. Opinions differ.



## Chapter Fourteen: The Haunting Truth

The hallway goes on forever it seems like. Sonic has slowed to a steady pace only because once he noticed he was alone, this place got like ten times creepier. The last time he was here, he was at least with friends and enemy robots. And, ya know, not a possible looming threat that could kill him at any moment. A serious threat at least.

He hates how the vents squeak every once in awhile. He should just be grateful this place is still up

and running. It's over 250 years old at this point. Maybe Eggman had been doing maintenance on this place since then? Then again, could Eggman really still be alive? He wasn't immortal like him and Shadow so...

Sonic shakes those thoughts from his mind. He had to focus. As much as he was joking before, more so to calm his own nerves and stall, he wanted to just get this information and go.

There's a sign on the wall that points to the labs and Sonic kind of breathes a sigh of relief. He was here. Now, all he had to do was boot up a computer and figure out what was going on. He'd usually leave stuff like this to Tails, but he's sure that if he runs into any issues with passwords or whatever, all he'd have to punch in is Maria's name. Probably.

His feet kick up some dust when he walks into the laboratory. He didn't expect anything to be clean, but there's a noticeable layer of dust on everything. Looks like no one has been here in years. Honestly, that's a good sign for him.

He whistles while he walks and stops when he sees a computer on the far end of the room, "This is gunna be a piece of cake." He makes his way over to it when he sees a green glow at the corner of his eye. There's a room in the back and he looks from the computer to the door anxiously. His curiosity is seriously getting the better of him, but he should just focus on the computer.

He makes a dissatisfied noise and hits the power button. It's taking an eternity to boot up. Sonic taps his foot on the ground impatiently and eyes the green light again. The loading bar on the computer screen is going *so slow*.

He feels his focus getting ripped back to the room in back before reasoning with himself, "I should check it out to make sure it's not anything bad, right?" He says that, but he kind of just wants to know what's omitting a glow that would put a thousand glow sticks to shame. "By the time I get back the computer will be up and running anyway. No use sitting here and doing nothin'," Sonic goes on to say, mostly to himself.

He walks toward the door and carefully pushes it open. His eyes widen when he sees what it is. It's a large glass capsule. His mind immediately goes back to Shadow's words about his first memories, floating in green tinted liquid with tubes in his body. Mainly, because the figure inside is in fact Shadow. Or at least Shadow from the future.

Sonic makes his way inside the room and stares up at him. Shadow doesn't seem to be moving. Just floating up and down from the small current going through the casing. The blue hero is surprised that this thing is even still up and running. Sonic leans in closer and taps his knuckle to the glass, "Huh. So, this is where you've been hiding. I should probably go get Shadow." Just as he's about to leave though, a shine catches his eye. There's a Chaos Emerald placed in a compartment that is connected to the capsule. He goes to grab it, but remembers Shadow's words about not touching anything. He's fighting with his conscious about it though. "It'll be faster to teleport to the docking station though," Sonic verbally reasons with himself.

He groans and places his hands on his hips. What should he do? His mind is telling him one thing and Shadow's words are telling him another.

Before he can mull over it any further, he hears a rush of bubbles coming from the capsule. Sonic slowly turns toward it and jolts backwards when he sees the dark hedgehog inside looking down at him. Sonic catches his breath and laughs a little, "Geez, Shadow! Don't do that! You almost gave me a heart attack!"

The hedgehog doesn't move though. He just stares down at Sonic very tensely. In a way Sonic has



seen his own Shadow do, but in this case it's a lot creepier because he's not moving or saying anything. He almost looks like a lifeless doll.

"You okay?" Sonic asks as he looks him over, "You're not hurt, are ya?"

The hedgehog in the capsule looks down at his arm and flexes his fingers as if they're stiff and they haven't been used in awhile. Once he forms a fist, his eyes return to Sonic and there's anger and hatred within the depths. He smashes his fist against the glass casing over and over again. It doesn't budge, just lets out a low reverberating thumping noise.

"Hey! Hey, easy! It's me, Shads!" Sonic says a bit nervously, "It's me! Sonic!"

The Shadow opens his mouth and bubbles pour out of his throat and Sonic swears he can hear his name muffled. It's hard to hear with all the noise though. The dark hedgehog winces like he's in pain and settles down a little bit.

Sonic takes a step closer with a loss of what to do. He should go get Shadow. He knows he should, but he doesn't want to leave this Shadow here alone either. He places his right hand on the glass and waits for a reaction.

The Shadow eyes his hand with seething rage, but then his expression changes. He looks confused at first, but then when he meets Sonic's eyes again it's like he's really looking at him. The hedgehog tries to float closer, but cringes when the tubes snag at his skin and some actually rip out creating fresh wounds.

Sonic looks horrified by that. "N-no, dude! Just stay," Sonic cries out to him, "Stay still. I gunna get you help, okay? Just don't move!"

The Shadow places his hand on the glass where Sonic's is and he's giving Sonic a look of sadness and regret. When he opens his mouth again and the bubbles come out slower, Sonic is sure he's saying his name this time. He lifts his hand up and gives the empty spot on his finger where his engagement ring should be a mournful look before pressing it up against his chest.

This is Shadow. Sonic can tell. This is the real Shadow from the future. He wouldn't react this way otherwise. Screw the computer. He needs to get to Shadow now.

The hero walks over to the Chaos Emerald and takes it out of the compartment, "I'm gunna use this, okay? I will come back for you, Shadow. I promise."

Shadow watches Sonic's actions and bangs on the glass again. He's trying to tell Sonic something.

"Easy," Sonic responds sternly, "I'll be right back. I won't leave you behind." Sonic warps using Chaos Control as he tries to remember where the docking stations are.

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Shadow finally makes it to his destination. When he gets there, he's surprised that all of the lights are on. He takes it as a bad surprise though. Why would all of the other lights on the ARK be off except these?

"Who's here?" Shadow shouts out, "Show yourself!"

There's footsteps and a shadow that casts across the ground. When the figure comes into view, Shadow rolls his eyes when he sees that it's just Sonic.

“Could you not stalk around like that?” Shadow says as he makes his way over to the computer. He tries not to look out the large windows at the Earth as his fingers tap at the keyboard, “And I thought I told you to go to the labs. Did you get lost?”

“Yeah, a little,” Sonic says as he makes his way over to Shadow’s side, “It has been awhile since I’ve been here.”

Shadow just grunts as the digitized screen finally pops up, “Regardless, I’m glad you’re here. It’ll be easier for me to keep an eye on you. There’s no use in you being up there if I can access the files from here anyway.”

“That’s just like you. A knight in shining armor,” Sonic states with a blissful smile, “What would I do without you, Shadow?”

Shadow eyes Sonic for a moment like he’s surprised to hear that. Especially since Sonic’s been really iffy with him helping him lately. He just shrugs it off though since he has more important things to worry about. He types in the word ‘Mephiles,’ but nothing pops up. “Strange...” Shadow states with confusion.

“What’s up?” Sonic asks as he leans his elbows against the bulky computer tower.

“When I type in Mephiles’ name nothing comes up,” Shadow murmurs to himself. He goes to type in ‘Project Shadow’ to make sure the system is still online, but just as he suspected all of his files come up no problem.

“Hm...” Sonic hums out before his eyes light up, “Oh, I know the problem.”

Shadow turns to Sonic in shock, “You... do?”

“Here,” Sonic says as he slides up behind Shadow. He rests his chin to Shadow’s shoulder as his hand slides onto Shadow’s hand, guiding the mouse around. His fingers type in ‘Project Dark’ and the files come up. It was definitely Mephiles. Shadow remembers the slight discoloration and those slitted green eyes.

“So, you looked it up before me,” Shadow concludes as he sifts through the files and reads them over.

Apparently, Mephiles was an experiment the doctor was working on to combat Sonic. He was supposed to be created with four different components, but developed early and escaped on its own. From what Shadow can gather, Mephiles is stronger than Sonic and possibly himself. Which is a little terrifying.

“Nope. I didn’t need to,” Sonic whispers to him and presses the front of his body against Shadow’s back, “Could you imagine it? Dark the Hedgehog? What a boring name. No, he named himself.”

Shadow can’t help feeling like something is off. “Sonic... What are you...?” He glances down at the hand on top of his and his heart seizes momentarily. This Sonic wasn’t wearing an engagement ring. Shadow tries to calm his breathing though. If he tips off this Sonic that something is wrong, there could be trouble. Especially if he’s Mephiles in disguise. “Can you tell me more about Mephiles,” Shadow asks as he continues to sift through the files.

“Whaddya wanna know?” The Sonic asks with a pleasant smile.

“What is he made out of? It only states that he was made out of three of the four key components,”

Shadow points out, loosening his stance as to not give himself away with how tense his insides really feel about this situation.

“Well,” the Sonic leans in to whisper in his ear, “He has all of our strengths and none of our weaknesses...”

“Shadow!” Sonic’s voice rings out from the entrance of the room, “I-I found you! I mean, I found your future you... and...” Sonic stops when he sees the blue hedgehog that looks exactly like him on Shadow. “Hey! Get off him, you fake!” Sonic cries out and revs into a ball. He shoots out and smashes into the imposter, watching him fall back against the ground. Sonic grabs Shadow’s hand and explains in a hurry, “We gotta get back to the labs, dude!”

Shadow’s eyes shoot down and sees the ring on his finger. He breathes and sigh of relief and nods to him.

The other Sonic slowly pulls himself to his feet and glares at Sonic with intense anger, “Are you ever gunna learn to stop sticking your nose into places it doesn’t belong? How many times are you gunna ruin my future?”

“Dude, I don’t even know what you’re talkin’ about, freak!” Sonic retorts with anger. He begins running toward the entrance, but stops when he sees the imposter appear in front of him. He gasps when a punch is sent to his face and he bounces a few times by the sheer force before landing hard on the ground.

“Why don’t you stick to your own timeline for once,” the other Sonic grits out. He turns to Shadow and looks like he’s going to attack him, but turns and rushes over to Sonic instead.

Sonic pulls himself up, but before he can a foot smashes into his ribs and he falls onto his back. He sees a familiar red shoe come down and he grabs it before it can collide with his throat. He spins a few times before tossing the imposter away from him. “Hey, if you stopped wrecking my future, maybe I would,” Sonic shouts back.

The imposter gets back up and clenches his fists, “This is just payback for what you did to me, you copy!”

Sonic just shakes his head, “You’re seriously gunna call me a copy? You’re dense.”

The imposter’s laugh comes out in small bursts before rising in volume, “You don’t belong here. You never did. Don’t you get it?” He turns to Shadow and looks him in the eyes, “How do you think this guy can bypass fate? I know you’ve noticed it. You can see things, dude. You can see little bits of the future. So, how is it that *this* guy can bypass anything you predict?”

Shadow takes a step back as his eyes widen, turning to Sonic.

“Dude, don’t listen to him! You seriously think I’m a fake?” Sonic states, “This is probably another one of Egghead’s weird-o experiments!”

The imposter throws his head back and lets out a loud exasperated noise, “How many times are you gunna fall back on that excuse? I was *not* created by the doctor. You really think Robotnik could make a competent robot?” He turns toward Shadow once more and folds his arms across his chest, “I mean, the only good robots he’s ever made were created by splicing DNA into living things. And yeah, Shadow. I’m talkin’ about Omega.”

Shadow takes a step forward and glares at the imposter, “Don’t speak to me as if you know me.”

The imposter's face drops and he's the one who looks confused this time, "...but you were the only one who treated me like the living thing I was. You and Omega rescued me. You spoke to me as if you were talking to *me*." He takes a step closer to Shadow and holds his hand out to him, "I'm probably the only living thing on Earth that's gunna understand you. Like, *really* understand you. We were both pawns in the doctor's plans. We were both manipulated into serving him. We were both living weapons. No one else is gunna relate to you as much as I will."

Sonic rushes forward and goes to kick the imposter in the face, but the moment he does the imposter grabs his leg midair. He pins Sonic down and Sonic rolls over and pins the imposter down. "He has no idea what you're talkin' about! This Shadow is from the past! *My past!* The Shadow you're lookin' for is upstairs!"

The imposter struggles under Sonic's grip and seethes back, "Your past *is* my future! Get out of my life, you stupid copy!"

"Wait," Shadow makes his way over to the two and pries the two fighting hedgehogs apart. He backs Sonic away and holds his arm out in a protective manner. Shadow looks over the imposter and tries to piece together the information given to him.

"He's a fake. Let's just tag team him and beat the snot outta him," Sonic calls out as he pushes against the barrier that is Shadow's arm.

Shadow's chest heaves as he whispers back to him, "I don't think he's a fake."

"Really?" Sonic says with a laugh like he thinks Shadow's joking.

Shadow turns his attention back to the imposter and whispers, "I've met you. I remember now."

Sonic's eyebrows shoot up like he can't believe what Shadow's saying. Was this another one of Shadow's ruses? Was he trying to throw this guy off?

The imposter gives Shadow a pleasant smile and takes a step toward him. Shadow backs up, pushing Sonic back with him. The imposter frowns at that and gives Shadow big, glassy eyes, "So, you're afraid of me now? You never used to be."

"How did you get like that, Metal Sonic?" Shadow asks with caution.

"...Metal?" Sonic asks with a disturbed look, "Shads, he can morph into my physical form. He copied Chaos' data! He can turn into anything."

"We are Chaos," Metal corrects, "I didn't need to copy Chaos' data to do any of that. I just needed to physically download his soul." He lowers his brow and gives Shadow an angry look, "And do I look Metal to you? No, I'm all organic. Like I used to be."

Sonic whispers to Shadow, "We can't trust him."

"But..." Shadow murmurs back like he isn't sure.

"Shadow, there's no reasoning with Metal," Sonic states with finality, "I get it. You wanna like... give him a second chance or whatever. I've been there and done that. You can't do that with Metal. He's... He's not like us. He can't be rehabilitated."

"I need to try," Shadow responds.

"No, you don't," Sonic states angrily.

Shadow finds himself taking a step forward, “He’s just lost... Like I was...”

Sonic pulls his arms around Shadow’s body and holds him back, “No! Don’t you see!? This is how he lured you here! This is why your body is in captivity again! This is why you aren’t in my future! This is the reason why Iblis destroyed the world and Mephiles killed me! It’s all because of *him*!”

Metal shakes his head at the two, “Are you ever gunna take the blame for anything? You came into my timeline...and because you never left, none of my friends knew I was gone. Life just went on with you in my place. And I stayed under the doctor’s control. *For years*. I could only watch as someone else lived my life for me.” He holds his hands out, “Shadow... Come to me. I was meant to meet you. We’re from the same timeline. You could sense me. I know you could.”

Shadow takes another step forward.

“You’re manipulating him!” Sonic shouts to him.

Metal smirks, “Not any more than you have already. The Master has control over the severs. That’s just how it is.”

Sonic grits his teeth and flips over Shadow’s body and rushes at his copy. He punches and kicks, but each one is blocked. He keeps at it even though the other is just as fast as him. He pushes his body to its limits, running and jumping and striking the other. Except Metal pulls a fast one on him. Twisting his body around in an unusual flexible way and slamming the side of his fists into Sonic’s gut.

It knocks all of the wind out of Sonic’s lungs and he doubles over in pain.

Metal makes his way over to him and stretches, “Aw yeah. It’s nice to have full motion of my limbs. My abilities were carved from adversity and you just got everything spoon fed to you. It’s made you soft. I’m stronger than you.”

“Maybe,” Sonic pants out as he gets back to his feet, “but you aren’t faster than me.”

Metal just shakes his head, “No, but I’m just *as* fast. Meaning, I have the edge on you.”

“Really?” Sonic smirks at him and pulls out the Chaos Emerald, “I’d say we’re evenly matched.”

Metal freezes and eyes the gem in horror, “Where did you get that?”

Sonic spins it on his fingertip and snickers, “The machine where you were keeping the future Shadow.”

Metal runs at Sonic and twists his body around to send another attack, but Sonic is expecting it this time. Sonic toys with him, throwing the emerald in the air, sending a few punches, before catching it and warping out of sight. Sonic comes from behind and sends a kick at the back of Metal’s head.

Metal falls onto his hands and knees, but prepares himself as Sonic rushes in. He spins himself up, sending the heel of his foot upwards into Sonic’s jaw. Metal’s eyes watch the emerald intently, sending precise kicks and punches, before flipping upward in front of Sonic. While he’s upside down he spins his body around and sends a devastating kick to Sonic’s side.

The emerald falls from Sonic’s hand as it clanks a few times before sliding across the floor. Just as Metal is about to grab it, Shadow’s shoe stops it and he reaches down to grab it. The dark hero glares down at Metal.

“Aw... Crud,” Metal states distastefully before falling back a bit.

"It's two against one, Metal Sonic," Shadow says with cool anger, "I'd suggest telling me what you know now."

"Stop calling me Metal," he responds with a frown, "How about we start there?"

Shadow sees Sonic getting back up and as he goes to rush at Metal again, Shadow holds his hand out to stop the hero. His attention falls back onto Metal, "What should I call you then?"

"Sonic," Metal tells him, "You should call me Sonic the Hedgehog because that's my name."

"There can't be two Sonics!" Sonic shouts back.

"And there isn't," Metal tells him, "You died in this timeline and I reigned supreme. I will always be the one true Sonic."

"You talked about another timeline," Shadow points out, disregarding his statement, "What does that mean?"

"When we were kids," Metal explains, his eyes not leaving Sonic's, "You traveled back and forth from the past and the future. You came to my future when the doctor used the Time Stones and you never left. You never went back to your own timeline."

Sonic looks down as if he's trying to comprehend the other's words, "But... You're a robot."

"No," Metal shakes his head with a smirk, "I'm a future version of you and you invaded my life. You're a parasite that needs to be purged. You don't belong here."

Sonic takes a step back like he doesn't understand.

"You fell in love with a fake," Metal scoffs at Shadow, "How does it feel?"

Shadow takes a step in front of Sonic and glares, "He's not a fake."

Metal eyes the emerald in Shadow's hand and then glances back up at his eyes, "How's that?"

"He's no more fake than I am upon arriving here in this timeline," Shadow declares as he sends a Chaos Spear at Metal.

Metal is quick like lightning though. He's behind Shadow in an instant and sends a hard sucker punch to Sonic's gut. As Sonic's body sails through the air, Metal appears right where he sent him and catches Sonic by the neck. The movements are all very precise and stiff as if he were actually a robot in an organic body. Metal holds his hand out to Shadow, "The emerald. Now. I'm not playing games."

Shadow glares at him, "You wouldn't."

Metal's grips Sonic's neck tighter and Sonic lets out a straggled gasp. Metal motions his hand out again, "I might look like him, but I assure you, Shadow, we're nothing alike. I'll take great joy in crushing his trachea. One less copy in the world the better."

Shadow holds his hands up as a sign of surrender and drops the emerald to the ground. He kicks it in Metal's direction and waits.

Metal stops the emerald with his foot and balances it on the tip of his shoe. He gives it a thoughtful look for a moment.

Shadow feels the sour sensation in his chest as he demands, "Give me Sonic."

Metal wrinkles his nose and responds, "I dunno? You weren't very specific with your exchange. I just asked for the emerald." His fingers squeeze at Sonic's throat tighter.

"Damn you, Metal!" Shadow shouts and rushes at him, but before he can get to him the two teleport away.

Metal tosses Sonic into one of the transport capsules and kicks the door shut. He warps over to the control panel and lets his hand linger on the lever.

"Chaos Spear!" Shadow cries out as he sends an array of energy spears Metal's way.

Metal doesn't move. He just smirks. He holds one hand up and catches each one as they surge through his body. He feels the electricity spark up his arm, through his chest and he aims his other hand out at Shadow, sending all of the energy back in Shadow's direction.

Shadow gasps and feels the electricity seizing up his muscles as he falls to the ground. His body spasms as he tries desperately to will his nerves to move at his command, but he's paralyzed for the moment.

"Did you forget that I downloaded your data too?" Metal reminds him with a snicker. He sighs and looks down at Shadow with a frown, "It's a shame. I really liked you. It sucks that you have this like... relentless allegiance to my dumb copy. We coulda really wrecked some serious shop together." He turns his attention back to Sonic who is banging on the glass casing, "It's another end in the timeline for you, my loathsome copy. There can only be one Sonic the Hedgehog." Metal pulls the lever and the capsule shoots out into space.

Shadow painfully wills his muscles to move, but it only has him struggling on the floor. There's nothing he can do though. Sonic is gone. He manages to control his mouth long enough to let out a pitiful, "No..."

"Yeeehaaah," Metal taunts him as he strides over to the downed hedgehog. He angles Shadow's face around with his shoe and smirks at him, "I always liked you, Shadow. You're a looker."

Shadow lashes his arm out, but it's stiff and limp and Metal dodges it like it's nothing. That doesn't matter though. Sonic's gone. His Sonic is gone. He failed to protect him. He closes his eyes tightly, wondering if there were any timeline where Sonic were to survive. "I'll see you in hell," Shadow grits out when he gets more control over his vocal chords.

"I'm sure you will," Metal snickers at him as he tosses the Chaos Emerald in the air a few times, "In the meantime, I have a mess I need to clean up. Don't worry though. I'll let my guests keep you company." Metal places two fingers in his mouth and whistles loudly before teleporting away.

Shadow groans loudly as he wills his arms and legs to move again, ignoring the agonizing popping of his joints. He's more than too late to catch Metal though. His real destination is the window as he watches the capsule get smaller and smaller until it explodes. Shadow winces at the sight and digs his fingers against the glass window.

His attention is shifted to the vents though when he hears metallic noises getting louder and louder. He grits his teeth and prepares for the worst. His eyes widen when he realizes what it is.

Dozens of Shadow androids burst through the vents and land in front of him, closing him into a corner. Their stiff movements and metallic steps get closer and closer until...

There's a blinding light and Sonic's body is tossed like a ragdoll across the ground. He's breathing deeply and urgently as he shivers. "I f-forgot how c-c-cold space was," Sonic gasps through frozen lungs.

Shadow skids across the ground and pulls Sonic against his chest, "What...? How...?"

"Uh..." Sonic looks around at the androids and says, "We should probably take care of your friends first."

Shadow would argue with him, but he knows he's right. He gets to his feet and pulls Sonic up with him. He notices Sonic's hand outstretched for him and he nods. He takes Sonic's hand and spins him around a few times before tossing him at the androids.

Sonic tucks himself into a ball and bounces from one robot to the next.

Shadow sends off a handful of energy spears before punching his fists through each android's chest that's paralyzed.

Most of the androids are down before Shadow grabs Sonic's hand and drags him out the exit and down the hall.

"Whoa! Wait! Where are we goin'!? There's still a few more left," Sonic shouts to him.

Shadow glares at Sonic from over his shoulder, "There's more than a few left. There's an entire army. The doctor built them while he kept me captive after I fell from the ARK years ago."

"Are you serious!?" Sonic feels his voice crack from the sudden revelation.

"I assure you. I am not joking," Shadow confirms.

"Saving 'em for a rainy day, I see," Sonic states sarcastically.

"Apparently," Shadow responds blandly.

Just then, another batch of androids burst from the vents in front of them and Shadow grabs Sonic by the waist and skids down a side corridor. They continue running as quick metallic steps follow after them.

"Maybe we should stop and take care of these guys before more come after us," Sonic suggests.

"Do not stop," Shadow orders him.

"Okay..." Sonic gives and tries not to look back, "I have a feeling you have a plan."

"We're headed toward the cannon outside the space colony," Shadow informs him, "These corridors are too cramped and we'll be easily cornered."

"Oh, I get it," Sonic snickers at the idea, "Instead of disabling them one-by-one it'll be easier to just push them off into space."

Shadow nods to him, "Exactly."

They look up and see the ground drops off. It's a 'faster way' down to the cannon. Meaning, they're just going to jump off the side and maneuver their way around lasers.

"Listen to me, when we get to the edge we're going to..." Shadow starts to say, but he sees Sonic



immediately jump off the side without warning.

“Geronimo!!!” Sonic screams at the top of his lungs before plummeting down the narrow passageway.

Shadow doesn’t have time to stop him, nor does he want to with how many androids are at his tail. So, he jumps not too shortly after Sonic. He stiffens his limbs to his sides and increases his momentum to meet with Sonic. “I actually understood that reference,” Shadow mumbles to himself.

“You say somethin’?! ” Sonic asks loudly, unable to hear him due to the wind whipping around them as they plummet.

Shadow just shakes his head and dismisses it before reaching out to take Sonic’s hand. Their hands come together as they control their trajectory while avoiding the lasers and come apart when they need to speed up. When they get close to the bottom, Shadow’s hover shoes ignite to life and land them safely on the metal ground and they head into the next room.

The room is one Sonic remembers on his way down to the cannon the first time he’s been here. It’s still filled with radioactive waste and the green stuff even glows in the dark. There are also a ton of doors and windows that can be hatched open. Which isn’t too good considering their current situation.

They continue on their way regardless. Their objective clear in mind. They pass through with not too much of a problem except when they get to the final door at the end, there’s no way to go but out. Shadow unlatches the door and they fall out through the dark canopy of space.

Sonic lands on some metal beams and grinds on them, thanking his past-self for wearing his soap shoes today. He can hear Shadow close by, his metal shoes grinding against the beams as well. As the beam drops off, Shadow’s shoes ignite and he scoops Sonic into his arms.

This gives Sonic a moment to realize just how many androids are after them and Shadow was right. It’s a freaking army and they’re rocketing off after them. A few are getting sucked toward the Earth’s gravitational pull, but not nearly enough for his liking.

Sonic sees the beams descend downward and spots the platform below. That’s definitely where they’re headed and he’s sure he can buy them some more time. Sonic reaches his arms out, grabs onto one of the metal beams with his hands, flips them around a generous amount of times before boosting them right at the platform.

The speed is intense, but Sonic’s aim is accurate. So, when they tumble onto the platform Shadow has no gripes about the rough landing.

Even with Sonic laying face first against the metal platform, he throws his hands in the air and muffles out loudly, “Wooo! That was awesome!”

“Don’t celebrate just yet,” Shadow reminds him and helps the blue hedgehog to his feet.

“I know. I know,” Sonic responds, but feels his insides fluttering uncontrollably when he shouts out, “but I’ve been *dying* for an adventure like this for years! I’ve never felt more alive!”

Shadow just raises an eyebrow at him. *This* is what Sonic wants? Running around a space station with a copy of himself threatening to kill him? Yet finding out he’s a god freaks him out. Then again, it shouldn’t surprise Shadow at this point. That is how their first adventure together went.

The androids begin landing all around them and Shadow prepares himself as he warns, “Brace

yourself.”

“Aw yeah! This is happenin’!” Sonic states as he clenches his hands into fists, “Bring it on!”

Sonic is more enthusiastic than ever. His body flips through the air and spins as he kicks, punches, and spin dashes at the androids. He’s having a blast. So much so that he mistakes Shadow for one of them and knocks him in the face.

Shadow grabs Sonic’s arm and reels him over his shoulder, tossing the blue hero at a pack of androids that just landed on the platform a considerable distance away, “Focus on what you’re attacking!”

“Sorry, Shaaaads!” Sonic shouts as he’s being tossed away, his voice traveling back with him and getting fainter.

Shadow huffs and continues his brawl with the poor excuses of metal. They do look a lot like him, but they’re lacking in actual combat power. They’re easily destroyed, but there’s so many of them. It’s like a swarm of annoying mosquitoes, but made of metal.

He notices it though. The androids landing in more and more quantities and him having to shy back with each step. Sonic is doing the same. He can see the end of the platform, but he can’t see the end of the fleets of these robots. This could get serious soon. Shadow tries to reserve some of his chaos energy in case worse comes to worse. What he’s working with is just his brute strength and trying to toss robots off the platform to gain some ground.

Sonic’s expression has gone from happy-go-lucky to very serious in a short amount of time. Especially when his foot slides toward the edge. “H-hey, Shadow?” He announces a bit anxiously.

“Just keep fighting,” Shadow orders.

“Sh-Shadow! Really!” Sonic shouts out to him.

Shadow turns his head angrily, but pales when he sees the problem. The fleets had started pouring in the small gap between him and Sonic and Sonic is getting backed up toward the edge. Shadow grits his teeth angrily and unclaps his inhibitors. His body radiates with gold energy and he plows through the androids, smashing them to pieces on contact. Just as he does so, even more show up in their place and the action only served to back Shadow up against the edge as well.

“What do we do!?” Sonic asks as he turns to Shadow.

Shadow seems to be at a loss for words. Even when he destroyed them with his inhibitors off, more come in their place. He just turns to Sonic like he doesn’t have an answer.

“No, Shads,” Sonic shakes his head, “We’re not goin’ down like this. You can think of something!”

Shadow’s trying to. All he can really do is fend them off until he and Sonic are pushed off the platform and plummet into space. That’s the only outcome he can see happening.

Sonic holds his hand out to Shadow and gives him a stern look, “C’mon! I’ll give you my energy!”

Shadow takes a breath and nods his head. They’re hands connect and their arms outstretch at the oncoming androids.

They shout in unison, “Chaos...!”

But end it entirely differently.

“...Spear!”

“...Control!”

Shadow snaps his head toward Sonic and questions, “Chaos Control?”

“I dunno? I panicked! I didn’t know you were gunna say Chaos Spear!” Sonic shouts back in defense.

“We can’t use Chaos Control without a Chaos Emerald,” Shadow reminds him.

“I... kinda just did,” Sonic points out sheepishly, “A minute ago.”

Shadow’s face drops, “What?”

The two turn their heads to look ahead of them. It’s a complete shock to both of them. A large number of androids stopped in their tracks, surrounded by chaos energy that’s mixing and flowing together. Shadow’s yellow flows together with Sonic’s blue and morphs together into a soft teal color. The androids not only look like they’ve been paralyzed by electricity, but they’re suspended and still like time has stopped.

Sonic freaks out a little, “What the heck!? Dude, I’m so sorry! This was an accident! I didn’t mean to do this!”

“This...” Shadow says in awe, “...is incredible.” He glances down with concentration and murmurs, “That’s how you were able to use Chaos Control with that fake emerald. You’ve been able to do it without a Chaos Emerald this whole time.” Shadow gets into a stronger stance and smirks, “Let’s see what this can really do.” His hold on Sonic’s hand tightens and he performs a Chaos Blast, except an explosion doesn’t appear. It’s more controlled and precise. All of the robots suspended in air are blown back, falling into one another like a domino effect.

Sonic sees this and his face turns to complete joy. He jumps and kicks his feet and thrusts his fists in the air in a triumphant manner as he shouts, “That was sweet! Shadow, you’re so freaking cool! You completely annihilated them!” Sonic lets go of Shadow’s hand and boosts through the last of the androids that are standing. He stops right in front of the last one and taps his foot against it delicately as it falls and gets sucked into space. He sticks his tongue out at it and returns, skidding to Shadow’s side. His smile drops a little on arrival, “You alright, Shads?”

Shadow is hunched over and holding his head. He’s trying to blink the spottiness from his vision. “Y-yeah, I’m fine. It’s just a small headache,” Shadow mumbles as he gets back onto his feet, “Perhaps we should use that as a last resort tactic in the future...”

Sonic leans in closer with a look of alarm, “Your nose! You’re bleeding!”

“Huh?” Shadow asks a bit groggily before wiping it away. The blood stains the back of his glove. He looks it over with boredom and shakes his head, “It’s nothing.”

Sonic’s first instinct is to fuss over Shadow, but the dark hero is already walking away. So, he drops his hands and just nods at him. He feels really bad for messing up their attack now. He didn’t think Shadow would have gotten hurt by it. It was probably because they weren’t in sync like they usually were when they’d do attacks like that.

“Come,” Shadow tells him, “Let’s find Blaze and get out of here. I think I’ve seen enough.”

“What!?” Sonic asks with appall, “We didn’t even stop Metal!”

Shadow turns to him sharply, “From doing what exactly?”

“From... From...” Sonic scrambles to find the words, but trails off when he looks down at the burning Earth below them.

“Acting now would be as pointless in trying to move a pawn after you’ve lost a game,” Shadow explains to him, “This timeline will remain as it is despite what we do here. Don’t forget that our only objective was to gather Intel.”

“Right,” Sonic says sadly as he rubs the back of his neck, “I guess I got carried away. I’m still in hero mode.”

“It’s alright,” Shadow states before turning to walk again.

Sonic catches up with him and hesitates before asking, “Does... me being from a different timeline bother you?”

“Does it bother you?” Shadow counters Sonic’s question with his own.

“Um... Yeah, a little,” Sonic mumbles.

“What troubles you about it?” Shadow questions.

“What *doesn’t* bother me about it? I mean... I’m a fake, right?” Sonic says with a nervous laugh.

“That’s incorrect,” Shadow retorts.

“Whaddya mean?” Sonic raises his brow like he thinks there’s a catch.

“You are made of the same molecular structure and genetic material as Metal’s current form. Being from a different period in time does not make you a fake. You’re very real,” Shadow explains softly, “Do you remember when my memories got extracted from my mind and I acted completely different? Well... I was harboring the same body, but was a different entity because the experiences I went through were taken from me. What makes you *you* is not the physical components.” Shadow still sees the distressed look on Sonic’s face and lifts his hand to take his, “I am glad you stayed in this timeline. I prefer you over Metal. The world would have been taken over by the time I had emerged and I would have been drastically different than I am now. You made me a better version of myself, Sonic. You made this entire timeline a better version of itself.”

Sonic gives Shadow a sad look and stops walking. His arm tugs at Shadow’s and the gesture stops Shadow from walking as well. “If... If I was the version of myself in this time... If I was Metal... You’d still fall in love with me...*him*, wouldn’t you?”

“Undoubtedly,” Shadow confirms with a nod.

Sonic turns away and cringes, “That’s so fucked...”

Shadow guides Sonic’s head back to him and presses their foreheads together, “I’m fortunate you’re here. Otherwise, I probably would have been used and manipulated in more ways than one. You’re the only one I love, Sonic. Do not forget that.”

“Be honest,” Sonic whispers to him as he places a hand on Shadow’s, “Have I ever...?”

Shadow scrunches his brow, “No, ...Sonic, don’t think that.”

“I have control over you though,” Sonic says as he desperately tries to stop tears from spilling down his cheeks.

Shadow hushes him and wipes the cool tears away before the frigid air can freeze them, “No, you have the ability to control me, but have never acted on it without my consent. Do you understand?”

“But... I’ve told you to do...” Sonic starts to say.

Shadow places a finger to his lips, “No, I have trouble articulating what I want, but you’ve never done anything I was ever uncomfortable with. Trust me when I say that you’d know.” He takes Sonic’s hand in his and guides him down the now abandoned platform, “Now, come on. Let’s go home.”

They make their way back where they came in. The radioactive waste still gleams in the darkness and Sonic shivers trying to get his body heat back up as his quills stand on end.

“Ya know, my first clue that I was immortal was probably being able to survive the cold atmosphere of space,” Sonic snickers a bit.

Shadow just lets a low laugh escape his throat in response. He’s just happy Sonic is back in brighter spirits so quickly.

Sonic is about to open his mouth when he hears his words being spoken from across the room, “Ignorance is bliss.” A chill runs up his spine and it’s not from the cold.

The sound of generators humming fill the room before the lights switch on to reveal Metal on the other side of the room, “Sorry, I know how you guys roll. Destroy my things and then go on your merry way and normally I’d call fair game, but you have something I need.” He waves at Sonic and snickers, “Hi, copy. What trick did you use this time?”

“None of your business,” Sonic retorts.

“You took the Chaos Emerald from me already,” Shadow points out, “There’s nothing else that you need.”

“Aw, your head looks like it hurts, Shadow,” Metal says with a knowing smirk as he points at his forehead, “Gimme the Soul of Iblis and I promise the pain will go away. *Permanently.*”

“Why would you need that?” Shadow snarls, “Apparently, you already have my body here on the ARK.”

“Yeah, funny story about that,” Metal states as he places his hands on his hips, “You took it out of your body and put it somewhere else. If I didn’t put your body in the destabilizing chamber, your body woulda died.” Metal makes his way over to the two and has a greedy glint in his eyes, “But luckily, Black Doom put yours in the moment he made you and since you’re fresh from the past, I know it’s inside you still.”

Shadow lifts his arm up and back hands Metal in the face.

Metal looks surprised for a moment before rubbing his sore face. He exchanges a look with the dark hero and seethes, “I don’t get you, Shadow.”

“Good,” Shadow responds with calm anger, “I don’t want you to.”

Sonic grabs Metal by the shoulder and shoves his knee as hard as he can into Metal’s gut and tosses

him at Shadow. Shadow takes Metal's arm and flips him over his shoulder as Metal's back meets the grated floor hard.

Sonic stands with his fists in the air ready to fight, but Shadow pulls his arm and they begin to run. "Where?! What are we...!?" Sonic shouts at him.

"Our objective, Sonic!" Shadow grits out to him, "Focus on that!"

"Cowards!!!" Metal's voice echoes through the room.

Sonic's heroism is fighting him. He wants to stay and fight, but he's trying hard to listen to Shadow. This isn't right. He can't just let this happen. There must be something he can do, right?

As they get to the doors, they blink green and slide open. Shadow halts in his steps though when he sees what's standing before him.

The dead, angry stare. The look of losing everything. Not having anything left to live for.

"*Move,*" the deep, blood curdling voice growls.

Shadow steps back, guarding Sonic with his arm as he lets him walk by.

It's Shadow's future-self taking slow, numbed steps. Each movement of muscle forces more blood to stream down his fresh wounds. There are some gashing from the tubing and some tubes still in place, but ripped from wherever it was attached to. Cuts line his skin like the glass casing had finally broke and his body damp with that green liquid. In his hand, he's holding a gun and he's headed right for Metal.

"We have to go," Shadow urgently informs a star-struck Sonic.

It takes a moment for Sonic to blink out of his stupor before he nods at Shadow. Shadow lets Sonic take the lead as they rush toward the door. Sonic makes it in when there's a shrill sound of a gun firing.

"We did it," Sonic pants out, "We made it." Sonic looks around, but doesn't see Shadow. He looks back and sees Shadow huddled on the ground. Sonic gasps and rushes over to him, almost afraid he was the one who was shot. "Shadow? Shadow, are you okay?" Sonic asks frantically as he looks him over.

Shadow doesn't answer. His eyes are looking a million miles away and he's hyperventilating.

"Shadow!?" Sonic shakes his shoulders to try and get a response.

Shadow is holding his head and breathing heavier, "Did I do it? Did I kill you?"

"What?" Sonic asks like he doesn't understand.

"Is he dead?" Shadow whispers and it's terrified and small.

"Shadow, I'm right here," Sonic says like he doesn't understand what he's talking about. He grabs Shadow's hands and places them on his cheeks, "Here, feel. I'm warm. I'm alive, alright?"

Shadow's fingers are quaking as he touches Sonic's skin. He feels around and the soft beating of his pulse thumps against his fingertips. It calms him down slightly, but not by much. He whispers, "And you... the other you?"

Sonic's eyes veer up and he looks away sharply. He bites his lip and doesn't answer. Sonic feels Shadow about to look behind him and Sonic grabs his head. "No, don't look back. Okay, just focus on me," Sonic says quickly, "There's nothing back there. All of this is... nonlinear, right? Different experiences. Um... Uh... Ya know, what we were just talkin' about."

"I did it," Shadow chokes out, "I killed you, didn't I?"

"Hey, hey," Sonic says to try and get his attention. When Shadow tries to crane his head backwards again, Sonic guides it back to him, "Shadow, look at me. Just focus on me. I'm right here."

Shadow's eyes don't focus right away. They're staring off in the distance, but they do finally settle in on Sonic.

"Good," Sonic nods and smiles at him, "C'mon. Let's stand up. We'll take baby steps. Think you can do that?"

Shadow takes a second to think it over before nodding.

Sonic feels the pang in his heart. He's used to Shadow being so strong and in control, but he knows he has to get the guy out of here right now. It isn't a place he should be. He helps Shadow onto his feet and let's him lean on his shoulder. Sonic takes one step and Shadow takes another. "Good. You're doing good," Sonic praises with a sad smile, "Keep going."

Shadow nods and keeps going. One foot in front of the other. One leg moves and then the other one follows. It seems doable. Things seem a little better.

Then, another bang happens and a loud thud.

Shadow falls into Sonic's chest and Sonic's throat hitches. "Wh-what happened?" Shadow asks frantically and goes to look behind him.

Sonic guides his head forward again and forces a smile for him even as tears stream down his cheeks, "Everything's fine, Shads. Keep going."

"I can't, Sonic," Shadow shakes his head and his legs start to buckle.

"Yes, you can," Sonic says, swallowing down his emotions, "I know you can. This is nothing. This is a cakewalk." He pulls Shadow back up to stable footing and takes a step backwards, "One foot in front of the other, dude. You can do it."

Shadow breathes and takes a minute before nodding. He hyper focuses his eyes on the ground and takes a step forward. He moves his feet with Sonic's and when they reach the doorway, the doors close tightly. The moment it does, they both collapse on the ground. Shadow is staring down at the ground, eyes unfocusing and refocusing. He tries to calm his breathing. He tries to think about anything other than what happened. Or rather what could have happened.

Shadow feels his head getting a little lighter and he's able to function again. He looks around at the empty room that leads to the corridors that go up to the docking station. His ear twitches when he picks up a noise. It's hiccupping sobs and he realizes it's coming from the corner of the room. His veins go ice cold when he sees Sonic huddled in the corner, fist pressed against the metal wall, and shoulders bobbing up and down.

"Sonic...?" Shadow whispers with confusion like he just noticed him.

"Everything's fine, Shadow," Sonic states cheerfully as gives Shadow the thumbs up. He doesn't

turn around though and his shoulders don't stop bobbing.

Shadow slowly gets up and makes his way over to him.

"Just give me a minute, okay?" Sonic says, sniffing.

Shadow stays back and looks back at the door. He swallows and asks, "Did... something happen?"

"Nope," Sonic answer with a laugh, "Everything's okay."

Shadow holds his head and closes his eyes, "I think... I blacked out. What happened to Metal?"

Sonic slams his fist against the wall and starts sobbing louder.

Shadow makes his way to Sonic and kneels down. He grazes his hand against his cheek, but reels back when he sees Sonic turn to him.

At first, Sonic looks angry, but then he just looks hurt and shocked. More so trying to process what had happened now that he actually has the time to think about it. He pulls Shadow close to him and buries his face into his chest.

Shadow embraces him and runs his hand down Sonic's quills, trying to soothe him. He lets Sonic cry and get it out of his system.

"Don't give up, Shadow," Sonic whispers to him, "Don't *ever* give up."

Shadow takes in Sonic's words and he's quiet for a moment. Small bits and pieces of what happened trickle into his mind and he gets it. He knows what he means. He nods and responds, "I won't. I have too much to lose now."

Sonic holds him tighter like that was exactly what he needed to hear, "Thank you."

"We're a unit," Shadow states with strength to his voice, "If one of us hurt..."

"...we're all hurt," Sonic finishes as he slides his head up to meet Shadow's eyes.

Shadow nods and leans in to kiss Sonic's wet eyes before wiping them dry, "Exactly."



# A Looming Threat



## Chapter Fifteen: A Looming Threat

When they meet back up with Blaze, she's standing where she should be patiently. She watches the two run up to her and she speaks, "I found something quite unusual."

"Yeah," Sonic states, "Welcome to the club."

"I think we've seen all we needed to," Shadow tells her.

Blaze turns away and frowns, "I believe you should see this. I found Dr. Ivory."

Sonic's face hardens and walks past Shadow, "Yeah? Lemme at him. I have a bone to pick with the old doc."

Blaze nods to him and begins to guide them down the corridor, "Very well."

"What would you say the threat level is," Shadow asks out of curiosity.

"Threat?" Blaze shakes her head, "No threat. The doctor was on our side when everything went down."

Shadow gives her a baffled look, but Sonic is still stomping and looking mad as ever.

"Yeah, I'm *suuure* he's innocent," Sonic says as he shakes his head, "I can just hear it now. 'Sonic, I'm sorry for doin' x,y, and z. I've finally changed. Give me another chance.' I'm not fallin' for that

again. I may not have an IQ of 300 or anything, but I'm not *that* dumb."

Blaze leads them to a room and stands outside the door with her hands together with a pensive look. She allows Sonic to go inside.

"Yo, Egghead! What's your deal? You totally wrecked..." Sonic's voice trails off and he turns to walk back out of the room.

Shadow sees Sonic's disturbed face and he takes the initiative to walk in his stead. Right away, he knows what's wrong. He takes a deep breath and makes his way over to the computer. The doctor's body is made primarily of metal except for 2/3rds of his face. His body is rigged up to an oxygen tank, but it would appear he's long since needed it. Shadow places his hand over the doctor's eyes and closes them before he wheels the chair over to the side. He grabs one of the white lab coats hanging from the hooks and drapes it over his body. He has to admit, he didn't much care for the doctor, but there was still a part of him that felt like they were family somehow. Not close or anything, but he was hoping he'd at least try to redeem himself before something like this happened.

Blaze slowly walks in and states, "There's a transmission. If you'd like to see it."

Shadow shakes his head, "I believe I know what happened."

"Wait," Sonic interrupts with a glassiness to his eyes, "Let me see it."

Shadow gives the blue hero a look of concern, "Are you sure?"

Sonic nods, brows lowered with a stern look, "I need to know. He was..." Sonic glance up at the vague figure under the lab coat. What was Eggman really? He wants to call him his friend. He wishes they were. Maybe they could have been if circumstances were different.

Shadow places a hand on his shoulder and nods to him like he understands what he's trying to say.

Blaze is at the computer, bringing up the file, "I believe it's the same transmission you received in this future. I have not seen it yet. So, if you'd like me to leave..."

"No way," Sonic shakes his head, "You know more than I do about what's goin' on. You have a right to know too." Even in the future, he's kept a lot of stuff under wraps. He wants to fix that when he gets back. He wants to start with telling his brother everything.

She just nods and clicks the file open. The screen loads up and the doctor's face shows up on screen. He's worn and tired and very much like the metallic body he once was. He looks up with regret in his eyes and stays silent for a moment like he doesn't know where to start. "I guess the log date to this doesn't really matter anymore. I just hope this transmission gets to you in time, old friend... I just..." He stops and coughs and it's dry like no amount of water could quench it, "It's probably too late for sorrys, right? I don't think you'd want them anyway. We've been at each other's throats since the beginning. I guess none of that matters either. There's not much time."

"Thank you for staying on earth and combating Iblis. I'd send Shadow, but... his body is too badly damaged that by the time I did he'd surely expire. He's really the only thing that can stop him completely. Like how you quelled Chaos many, many years ago. That's just another mistake under my belt."

"I sent the Time Stones like you requested. Blaze should be able to pick them up close to the city. I kept their location a secret to only her. As for the bioweapon, the one I created to defeat Mephiles if something like this were to happen, I transported it to the Mystic Ruins base. I rigged the security system so that only Blaze can get through. I'm sorry... I'd let you escape into the past as well except.

Well, you saw what happened with Metal. There cannot be two versions of anyone in one timeline. I couldn't imagine what having three Sonics would do."

"Which is again, my fault. I just... if I could do one thing right in my life, I want it to be this. I know I've asked too much of you in my elongated life, but please, do this for a better future. Good-bye, Sonic."

Before the transmission can cut off, there's footsteps heard and a voice cuts in, "Hey there, doctor. What cha up to?"

The doctor has a look of horror as he turns around, "N-nothing! I wasn't doing anything!"

"Uh-huh," the voice snickers like he doesn't believe him.

The monitor is moved for a moment and there's struggling in the background. Sonic leans against Shadow's shoulder when he hears the gasps of air and then silence. Shadow wraps an arm around the hero and is about to turn the video off when he sees some movement.

Sonic comes into view. Or rather Metal. He pulls up a seat and sits on it backwards, staring into the monitor. "Let me guess. I'm talking to my copy, right?" He shakes his head, "I noticed the Time Stones missing and I know Project Light is 'in shipment.' All I can say to you is this... Go ahead. Throw it into the past, train the bioweapon, and try to defeat Mephiles. I dare you. I welcome the challenge. There's one teeny tiny, itsy bitsy problem with your plan and I'm a step ahead of you."

"Your little secrets? They're your undoing. How's anyone gunna know what that thing is? Whoever you send that to in the past is gunna have to come here. They're gunna have to come back to the future and when they do, oh man..." Metal tips the screen lower and looks up into it with a menacing smirk like he knows he isn't just talking to Sonic's future self anymore, but *them*, "Let me tell you one thing. The moment you walk back onto this ARK... that's it. I've won. Even if you come here and kill me. I've won."

Sonic shares a look with Shadow before staring back into the screen.

"You walked into a tiger cage, baby. Seems safe now, but just wait," Metal snickers as he pushes the screen back and gets into a lax position, "The moment Mephiles fuses with Iblis, the game is over. When the last piece falls into place, I will *erase* you from history entirely. You won't even get one *strand* of a timeline. I will make sure you cease to exist."

Sonic whispers to Shadow, "What is he talking about?"

Shadow isn't sure himself.

Metal holds up two fingers, "Sonic and Shadow are the two vessels." Metal holds up two fingers on his other hand, "Chaos and Iblis are the souls." He crosses his fingers together with one another, "When they all come together... I'll have Solaris. The beginning of the universe. Space and time itself. It exists in the past, present, and future and I will have full control over which parts of history I want to write and erase. I'm the controller after all. I am the king of gods. This is *my* world." Metal gets up and places the monitor back in front of the doctor as his laughs fade away and there's nothing staring back at them except the doctor's body before the screen cuts out.

Sonic doesn't understand.

"We should leave now," Shadow tells them, Metal's words worrying him.

Blaze nods and turns to Sonic.

Sonic takes out the Time Stone and watches as Shadow does the same. They hold them up like they had before and a portal appears.

Shadow lets the two go through first and just as he's about to jump in himself, he stops. Shadow turns and sees movement from the other side of the room. He looks down at the shadow he's casting on the ground and follows it up. It stretches up to the wall and even as he remains perfectly still, the dark figure of what should be himself spasms in unnatural movements.

Shadow turns and quickly jumps through the portal, landing back in the Mystic Ruins. As the portal closes, he looks back down at his shadow and it seems to be back to normal. Maybe it was the lighting or his nerves. He tries to push the thought from his mind.

Shadow watches as Sonic walks up to Tails who is sitting in the grass working on something or another and sits down with him. He looks down at Silver who is sleeping peacefully in the mess of his brother's tails and lets a smile grace his lips. His face turns sterner when he looks back at Tails, "I need to tell you everything, bro."

Tails stops what he's doing and gives Sonic his undivided attention, "Okay. Just start from the beginning."

As Sonic goes to explain everything, Shadow sees Blaze walk past him to Amy, who apparently didn't leave from exasperation like he thought she had. Blaze takes her hand and says, "Lady Rose."

Amy blinks a few times and looks behind her before pointing at herself, "Me?"

"Yes, your premonition of Iblis being a god and not a monster was correct," Blaze says, "Please, will you tell me more of my future?"

"Oh, uh..." Amy looks a bit nervous like no one's really asked that, "Sure, let me go get my tarot cards. They're in my purse."

"I will come with you," Blaze states as she follows the other back into the home.

Shadow holds his head and just now realizes how bad it hurts after his nerves have calmed down. That attack. It was strong and it took less chaos energy to use, but the physical toll was brutal. It happened by accident, but even with the pain it was good to know it existed.

He makes his way back into the home after hearing Sonic say, "So, ya know how I'm Chaos...?" to Tails. Shadow turns the stove on for a pot of water before disappearing into the bathroom and grabbing some painkillers. He makes his way back out and waits for the kettle to whistle.

He can hear Amy shuffling her deck on the coffee table where her and Blaze are sitting. He decides to eavesdrop on their conversation while he's waiting.

"So, these cards can predict what will happen," Blaze asks like she's baffled by the idea.

"Oh yeah. They work like a charm," Amy tells her, "That's how I knew you were on the beach when you first arrived."

Shadow raises an eyebrow at that. So, that's how Blaze skated under GUN's radar. Was it truly possible Amy could tell the future? And if so, how far into it? At this point, he wouldn't be surprised given how skillful Sonic's friends are.

Amy goes down the roster of things. Telling Blaze her past and her present. From what Shadow can tell, it all seems pretty accurate. Given a gift in the past and feeling unsure the direction of her present

day situation. Shadow turns the stovetop off when he sees the steam coming from the spout and pours the hot water into a mug, dipping a teabag inside.

Blaze lets out a worried noise, “Death.”

Shadow stops and watches the two from over his shoulder.

“Oh, don’t worry. The death card can be daunting, but it doesn’t actually mean death. It could mean a drastic change in your life. Like... think of it as a rebirth or a transition rather than a physical death. Letting go of the past so you can move on.”

“I see...” Blaze says with a saddened tone, “That is true. I’ve been fighting for so long and the weeks I’ve spent here, I felt very... stagnant. As if I don’t know what to do with my life anymore. I was constantly at war alongside my king. I had a purpose and was given orders. Without his command I feel as though I do not have a purpose any longer and... it feels like I’ve failed him somehow. Do not find any offense to my words, but I’ve tried to replace him with your current Sonic... Except, he isn’t *him*. That, and before I left for this time period, my king gave me one final order and I’m having trouble processing it.”

Amy sits patiently as she listens to her words before asking, “What was it?”

“I asked him what I should do after I deliver the bioweapon to him in the future and he told me that it was for me to decide. That... he wanted me to live happy,” Blaze explains.

“Well...” Amy says with confusion, “What don’t you understand?”

“I’ve never known happiness,” Blaze states quietly, “It was just flames and... war. It’s hard to comprehend life without his orders. I’ve never decided anything without his command. How do I live this new life?”

Shadow looks away and closes his eyes. He’s felt those very same emotions. He isn’t sure exactly what she’s gone through or if it were better or worse than his situation, but he does know how it feels to no longer have a purpose. The calm after it all is more chaotic than the chaos itself sometimes.

“You can fight for a new cause,” Amy says with a chipper tone, “You can help us fight for freedom.”

“Freedom,” Blaze tests the word on her tongue.

“Being able to do what you want without any restraints,” Amy explains with a smile.

“I don’t understand...” Blaze murmurs quietly.

“That’s okay,” Amy tells her, “It can be a learning process. If you learn to fight for freedom, you’ll learn more about being free! It’ll help you understand what it means!”

Blaze finds herself smiling at that, “Alright. Thank you, Lady Rose.”

Amy pushes her away playfully, “Just Amy! You can call me Amy!”

“Alright,” Blaze nods, “...Amy.”

Shadow hides his slight smile against the mug of his drink and takes the medicine before heading back outside. She’ll be just fine here. He thinks that maybe the Sonic from the future, her king, knew exactly where he was sending her. Perhaps those two Sonics weren’t so different after all.

Shadow sits quietly with Sonic and Tails, listening to Sonic trying to organize his thoughts as he explains everything to his brother. It goes back and forth from Sonic explaining something, Tails asking a question about it and Sonic metaphorically kicking himself for unintentionally leaving details out. Tails does manage to get everything out of him though. Watching the exchange does give Shadow some insight to Sonic's thought process though. Sometimes, he doesn't even mean to withhold information. Sometimes he's just disorganized and legitimately forgets. It's good to know for future reference.

"...And that's it," Sonic finishes, "I hope."

"Wow... That *is* a lot of information in such a short amount of time," Tails agrees with a thoughtful look.

"Tell me about it," Sonic groans as he shifts to lay on his stomach, "I'm dizzy just thinking about all of it."

"There's something that does make sense though," Tails explains carefully, "At least, the elemental relationship of Chaos and Iblis. Chaos represents water and air. And Iblis represents earth and fire. So, when put together, it's a combination of all the elements. Everything that's ever been created. It's... it's almost as if Solaris is a star."

Sonic raises an eyebrow, "A star?"

"Think about it. Everything is made from components of stars. All of the elements of the periodic table. Everything in our bodies," Tails begins to say, "It's even theorized that the Big Bang itself was the death and explosion of the first star. It almost reminds me of when you talked about how the Master Emerald and the Chaos Emeralds were created. It started off as one giant gem, but Iblis' power was too strong so it broke off into smaller gems in order to stabilize itself."

"I have no idea what you're talking about, but I'm going to assume you're right," Sonic tells him with a snicker.

"Maybe you should actually read the book on Astrophysics instead of pressing flowers into it," Tails retorts with a smirk.

"Oh, har har," Sonic says sarcastically as he picks at a blade of grass.

"To be fair, I did that," Shadow admits to ease the blame from Sonic.

"Stop taking the blame for him," Tails complains jokingly.

"Here's my question," Sonic says with a pout, "Why the heck don't I look like my old self? Like... Why don't I look like Chaos. I know why I don't look like watery drip Chaos, but why don't I look like the Chaos before his soul was ripped from his body?"

"It's because we are man-made, Sonic," Shadow states.

"So?" Sonic asks as he rolls to his side and rests his fist to his cheek.

"Gerald was also an archaeologist who helped uncover some of the ruins. His first discovery must have been the mural of Perfect Chaos," Shadow explains.

"Why do you think that?" Sonic asks.

"Oh! I think you're right, Shadow," Tails pipes up, "The first project they made was a giant lizard!"

The biolizard! They were probably trying to reconstruct Chaos!”

“Yes,” Shadow nods, “but it wasn’t obedient. It was out of control. It was raw anger that could harness the Chaos Emeralds. It was also unstable and it’s body coming undone. I believe they were trying to reconstruct Solaris to find a cure for Maria.”

“But I thought you said you were the cure,” Sonic murmurs as he looks away nervously.

“I was... And I was a white hedgehog before Black Doom put Iblis’ soul in me,” Shadow states with a frown, “I believe if both the soul of Chaos and Iblis were placed in me I’d be...” Shadow lifts his hand to the white patch on his fur before glancing over at the child sleeping in the fox’s tails.

Sonic sits up and gives Shadow a concerned look, “As long as I’m being honest about everything... I have something to tell you about all of that. Eggman... he told me that I was the cure for that disease. He... he has the same sickness as Maria.”

Shadow slowly looks up at Sonic and frowns, “Eggman could have been lying to you.”

Sonic shakes his head, “No... he was the one who told me about Chaos’ soul. You saw him. His body was robotic. That wasn’t because of old age or anything. He was replacing his failing organs and stuff...”

“I don’t understand,” Shadow says softly, “Why did you feel the need to keep that from me?”

“I dunno?” Sonic shakes his head, “I knew the Time Stones were out there somewhere and... I knew how much you cared for Maria, dude.”

Shadow’s eyes widen when it clicks, “You really thought I’d sacrifice your life for hers?”

“I don’t know?” Sonic says as he backs up, “I don’t know!”

Shadow closes his eyes and rubs at the throbbing at his head when he explains, “Listen to me. I loved Maria very dearly, but those things happened in the past. I know memories from it still haunt me, but I have let my past rest there. I would not throw everything I have now away for that.” Shadow adds with a whisper, “She wouldn’t want that for me either.”

Tails sees the tension between the two and cringes. He fiddles with his fingers for a moment as he rethinks everything before saying, “So... If Shadow was meant to be a cure for Maria... and Sonic was supposed to be a cure for Eggman...” Tails taps his finger to his lip before saying, “I don’t think either one of those is correct.”

“Come again?” Shadow asks as he looks at Tails like he’s lost it.

“I think... and this is just a theory, but I think they would need both of you,” Tails concludes, “In the early stages of Shadow’s development... he was meant to be Solaris. Maybe there was a mishap while making Chaos. Maybe Black Doom didn’t want Chaos to be created at all because *he* wanted to be the controller. Therefore, Sonic wasn’t created until way later...when Eggman developed symptoms for the disease. More time would have passed and technology would have gotten better. There would be a new reason to launch the program.”

“Did the doctor truly begin making Mephiles because he was making a weapon to destroy Sonic... or was he trying to create his own cure?” Shadow wonders out loud.

Sonic rolls over with a groan, “No, pretty sure he wanted to kill me.”

“Metal wanted you dead,” Shadow points out, “The doctor aided in...”

All three turn their attention toward Silver and then look back at each other.

“Two prototypes for two different reasons,” Tails concludes, “Eggman must have known Metal’s intentions with Mephiles. That’s why he was never completed. In order to save the entire existence of reality, he gave up the one thing that would cure him.”

Shadow looks speechless, “I... never would have thought the doctor would do such a thing...”

Sonic stands up and looks down at the sleeping baby before jumping up and down excitedly, “I’m Silver’s biological dad!!!” He scoops the baby up and twirls him around happily.

“Uh... Sonic, I wouldn’t...” Tails tries to warn.

It isn’t even a second later when Silver throws up on him. Sonic hangs his head and whimpers, “Aw... man...”

Shadow eyes the two with a soft smile before he looks down with concentration. He wouldn’t voice it. Not out loud, but what would that make Mephiles?



# Midnight Thoughts

## Chapter Notes

Hey there! I'm just letting you know that I'm on vacation, meaning this story will be on hiatus for a few weeks. Thanks in advance for your patience. Bye-bye! <3

I'll be back soon!



## Chapter Sixteen: Midnight Thoughts

Tails asks them if they want to stay another night to which Shadow declines. He still harbors a sense of guilt for staying as long as they have even though he knows he probably shouldn't. He still pays Tails for helping though.

Getting home and bringing their belongings back is much easier with a Chaos Emerald. Although, when everything is set back in place and things have calmed down, Shadow can't help but feel this heaviness on his heart. It's weighing him down and he can't figure out what it is.

Sonic places a hand on his back and says like he can read the distress on his face, "Hey, don't worry. A lot has happened. It's probably going to take some time getting used to."

Shadow nods back to Sonic. The hero tries to distract him with Silver's play gym, but for some reason the magic isn't there anymore. He just feels kind of empty. He wants to smile at it and he

wants it to make him happy, but it isn't there anymore.

It's frustrating.

When Sonic tucks the kid to sleep, Shadow just remains in the room. He stares down at the sleeping child and wonders why that sense of awe isn't there anymore. He loves Silver. He knows he does, but something is missing.

Shadow makes his way out of the room and making sure to close the door tight behind him. He walks into the bedroom and lets Sonic pull him in, kissing him passionately. Shadow frowns and closes his eyes, trying his best as he wills himself to get into it. It only gets up to the point where he presses Sonic up against the mattress and he's looking away with a disappointed look.

"What's wrong?" Sonic asks with confusion.

Shadow goes to open his mouth, but he doesn't know how to answer. He just pulls away and lays down next to him, "Sorry... I just don't feel it."

"It's okay," Sonic reassures him with a smile, "It's been a long day. Let's just get some sleep."

Shadow nods. Maybe that's it. Maybe they've just been through a lot. He doesn't know. He rolls over and pulls the blanket over him as he feels Sonic's body hold him from behind. He closes his eyes and frowns when he just feels numb to it. He wants to enjoy this warmth between them, but he just physically can't.

He lays awake as he watches the neon numbers change slowly minute-by-minute until the hours leisurely march on. It's when it turns 3am that he can't take it anymore and has to get up and do something. Waiting for the sun to rise is agony.

He walks down the hall and blames his tired eyes for seeing a figure running down it. It's nothing. It's his mind playing games with him. He follows the hall down to the bathroom and turns the faucet on. He rubs his tired eyes with water when he hears something.

It's low hummed laughter. It sounds similar to his, but more playful.

Shadow wipes his face with a towel and looks around, "Who's there?"

Silence.

Shadow groans and holds his head. Great. He was hearing things. Of course no one is here. Sonic and Silver are sleeping soundly.

Shadow splashes his face with water again, trying to wake himself up more. Laying awake in the dark was messing with his senses.

"You know, paranoia comes hand-in-hand with insomnia."

Shadow lifts his head up again and opens his eyes. He stares into the mirror and jolts back when he sees that it isn't his own face looking back. Well, it is, but it isn't. It's Mephiles.

"What? How did you...?" Shadow demands.

"I'm not here," Mephiles tells him, "You're just seeing things."

"Bullshit," Shadow snarls. His eyes widen when he sees his own face again. Shadow carefully touches the mirror and then his own face. He catches his breath and shakes his head. There's no way

Mephiles got through the portal. He's still in the future.

...But maybe he's not.

Shadow sits down on the closed toilet seat and holds his head. What is he doing? This was stupid. No one was here. He's just tired.

"Why do you keep fighting?"

"Shut up," Shadow whispers as he holds his ears, "You aren't here."

"Why do you resist?"

"You're not real," Shadow grits out, gripping his hands harder.

"No matter what paths you chose, they all lead down one way. Like streams dumping into the ocean. It all leads to Sonic's demise. It's fate. It'll happen over and over again. You can be reborn as many times as you want, but everything you love will always be ripped away from you."

"Shut up!" Shadow growls out, closing his eyes tighter.

"You know it's true. It's written in the stars. Like Rouge has so eloquently put it: Romeo and Juliet. But which are you? Will you poison yourself or use the knife? Then again, what difference will it make? The future is certain. You will be the cause of his death."

Shadow can't catch his breath. He remembers the gunshot. Ringing through his mind. First with Chaos, then Maria, and then Metal. It ends with Mephiles ripping the soul from Sonic's chest as Blaze watches.

"It's all the same. History repeats itself and you are stuck in an endless pattern of pain and despair. Why take so much time building something that you'll inevitably destroy? Silver will lose control and the humans will take him. Sonic will try to rescue him like the hero he is and you will watch as the humans take his life. It'll be another life being ripped away from you and you'll fall into despair once more. Promising revenge on those who took everything from you."

"No," Shadow pulls himself up and looks into the mirror, "You're wrong!"

It's his reflection, but it's looking back at him and smirking, "Am I? It's already happened."

Shadow seethes and curls his fingers into a fist, punching the reflection. The glass shatters and he realizes too late there are shards of it embedded into his knuckles and he's bleeding on the counter. "Damnit..." Shadow holds his hand and clenches his teeth, trying to suppress the voice.

Shadow feels the body stalk up behind him and he's met with those bestial slitted eyes, "We're monsters. We need to be detained."

Shadow grabs Mephiles by the throat and pushes him into the wall, pinning him there. Shadow's shaking from both fear and anger.

He sees Mephiles' hand reaching around next to him for the light switch and when the light turns on, it's Sonic's face staring back at him, "Sh-Shadow...?" He's trying to speak against his closing throat.

Shadow reels himself back in horror and pulls his hand away from Sonic's throat. He falls back against the tiled ground and gives him regretful eyes, "I'm... I'm sorry... I..."

"Easy, Shads. It's okay," Sonic tells him, rubbing the soreness on his throat, "I've dealt with worse."

"I hurt you," Shadow whispers in disbelief as he looks down at his hands, "I hurt you..."

"Are you bleeding?" Sonic asks with shock. He looks up at the shattered mirror and rushes over to his side, "You *are!* Let me see!"

"Don't touch me!" Shadow cries out with alarm and scoots himself closer to the corner, "Don't touch me, Sonic..."

Sonic doesn't. Not yet anyway. He knows he needs to let Shadow calm down first. "Everything's okay," Sonic tells him in a soothing tone as he goes to open up the cabinet. He retrieves some tweezers, alcohol, and bandages as he asks, "More of those flashbacks?"

"What?" Shadow asks with bewilderment.

"Rouge told me about 'em. Your night terrors and stuff," Sonic states.

Oh, those. He hasn't had those in awhile and when he has had them they were mild. He was really bad when he was living with Rouge. This wasn't like that though. Or maybe it was? He isn't sure. When Sonic came into his life things settled a lot and it's been hard to remember being anyway else.

"I think so," is all Shadow can say.

Sonic nods in understanding, "I wouldn't be embarrassed about this. Ya know, I used to sleepwalk too. This one time, when I was still living with my bro, I slept walked to the fridge and ate a entire chili dog whole and barfed all over the floor. I had to clean it up before Tails woke up so he wouldn't yell at me." Sonic's laughter echoes through the bathroom and it's nice and uplifting. He turns and sits in front of Shadow and watches the other flinch. "Don't worry. I'm just gunna take a look at your hand. I won't touch anything else," Sonic explains as he balances the retrieved items on his thigh.

Shadow looks hesitant at first, but does move his arm out for Sonic. Sonic's hand is warm around his and it causes him to lean closer into the wall. He doesn't want to be near him, but he doesn't want to be close to anyone else at the same time.

"Don't worry about the PTSD stuff, Shadow," Sonic states as his eyes are focused on plucking the small shards of glass out of the dark hero's hand, "I know it's like... a reaction. You can't help it. It was my fault for sneaking up on you like that. So, don't feel guilty for what happened."

Shadow winces as each piece of glass is being taken out one-by-one. He feels bad for his blood dripping down his knuckles and onto Sonic's hands. He can barely see it on his own, but Sonic's skin is so pale and so easily tainted. Shadow looks away and closes his eyes shut.

"Hurts a little, huh?" Sonic asks with a frown, "It'll be over soon."

Shadow feels that heaviness on his heart again, except this time it's painful like a vice, "Why are you with me?"

Sonic gives him a cocky look, "Because I love you."

"No," Shadow shakes his head, "but why? What could you possibly see in me?"

"You're kind and loving and selfless and..." Sonic starts to list off.

"Lies," Shadow growls out, "Those are all lies."

Sonic stops and looks him over, “I wouldn’t lie to ya, Shads. It’s the truth.”

Shadow opens his eyes and exchanges a look with Sonic. His eyes are tense, focused, and unyielding. The scene runs a shiver up Sonic’s spine. “I’m going to be the death of you,” Shadow murmurs with warning in his voice.

Sonic stares back at Shadow for a moment before stifling his laughter, “Good one.”

“The paths...” Shadow whispers, trying to focus, “...they lead to your demise.”

“I think you need a proper vacation,” Sonic’s lips twist into a snarky smirk, “Don’t worry. I’ll talk to your commander first thing in the morning and explain everything... So, after we’re done here I want you to march your butt back into bed and...”

“Sonic...” Shadow grits out with anger, “I’m going to destroy us. I’m going to destroy this world.”

Sonic sighs and soaks a rag with some alcohol and rubs it against Shadow’s hand. He watches Shadow’s fingers tense by the contact alone. He makes sure he gets it in the deeper cuts really good before finally removing it. “You just need some rest,” Sonic concludes as he begins to bandage the wound, “These are all midnight thoughts in your head. I get ‘em too sometimes. Everything will be better in the morning. I promise.”

“But...” Shadow tries to say.

Sonic shakes his head and pulls himself up. He holds his hand out for Shadow. “Don’t listen to those thoughts in your head, Shadow,” Sonic says with a smile.

Shadow looks a bit thrown off. He never mentioned anything about hearing voices, but then again he could just mean in general. He lifts his hand and lets Sonic help him back up.

It’s like a magic trick because this time, when his head meets the pillow and Sonic curls up next to him, he’s out like a light.

# False Sense of Reality

## Chapter Notes

I hate April Fools day. Here's a chapter.

This isn't a joke chapter either. It's legit.



## Chapter Seventeen: False Sense of Reality

Shadow feels the sun hit his eyes and he jerks awake. He glances at the time and frantically gets up. He was late. Maybe if he got ready now and left, he'd be able to make it to the morning meeting on time. He quickly clasps his inhibitors around his shoes and begins to head out of the bedroom.

He stops when he hears Sonic's voice though.

"I know. I know, but blame me for that, sir," Sonic's tone sounds like it's pleading a bit.

Shadow is confused. He creeps down the hall and glances around the corner. He can see Sonic balancing his cell phone with his shoulder as he feeds Silver and makes breakfast.

"The guy needs a vacation though. A real one. I know you can work something out. I mean, you're the commander, right? People gotta do what you say," Sonic tries to reason.

Shadow grits his teeth and is about to walk into the room so he can stop Sonic. His foot doesn't move though because his heart clenches when he hears Sonic go on.

"I'm really worried about him," Sonic says quietly.

Shadow feels paralyzed. He made Sonic worry. Shadow clutches his fist and still feels the sting of the wound. Of course he's worried about him. He went off the rails last night.

"There's a lot happening on our end. Isn't there like... paternal leave or something?" Sonic goes on as Shadow can hear the familiar tap on Sonic's foot on the ground. The tapping he does when he's getting impatient with something. Sonic is getting a little more irritated with him now, "Look, let me level with you for a minute. You and Shadow go way back. He isn't just another agent. I know you view him as family too. You both viewed Maria as a sister. So, I'm beggin' ya to pull some strings. This is a special case. I know you've got a heart under that rough exterior. You wouldn't care for the people on the ARK if you didn't."

Shadow winces. He wants to stop Sonic. His commander is going to be on his ass when he gets to work. They had a silent agreement they wouldn't bring stuff like that up.

But something surprises the hell out of him. Sonic's laugh and his mood brightening as he says, "Thank you, sir. A week is plenty of time. I'll send a gift basket your way on Christmas or somethin'. Talk to ya later!"

How the hell did Sonic do that?

It isn't a moment later when there's a knock on the door as Sonic scrambles with everything in his hands before he rushes to go answer it. Shadow presses against the wall and slows his breathing so he can listen.

"Hey, Ames! Glad you could make it on such short notice," Sonic greets happily.

"Of course," Amy responds with a smile to her voice, "You're lucky I was on my morning jog and was in the neighborhood."

Sonic just snickers at that, "Yup, thanking my lucky stars right now."

"So, what do you need?" Amy asks with a peppy tone, "Silver acting up?"

"Uhhhhh..." Sonic's voice trails off and his voice grows quieter, "I need you to take care of the place while I'm gone. Make sure Shadow... *relaxes*. I don't want him doing anything."

Amy seems a bit confused by this, "Sure, that's no problem. Where are you going?"

"I'm uh... headed out to my old summer job again. I just don't want Shadow to be taking time off and worrying about money or anything," Sonic explains a bit nervously.

"Did something happen?" Amy asks, her voice lowering as well.

Their voices are really quiet and hard to make out. Shadow leans his head to the side, closes his eyes, and opens his mouth slightly as he concentrates on the syllables being uttered. He releases the air in his lungs and relaxes his diaphragm and focuses on the voices again.

"Maybe I'm just being paranoid, but I think our last mission to the future really messed Shadow up," Sonic murmurs softly, "He had me really freaked out last night, but maybe those are my nerves too. Do you think I'm overreacting?"

“No,” Amy says with reassurance, “I’d be concerned if you weren’t worried. It’s normal to worry about your significant other.”

“I’ve never seen him like this,” Sonic says back in a sad tone, “He’s usually... *Shadow*, ya know? He’s all calm and poised and stuff. Now, he’s... I can’t even explain it.” He continues like he’s upset, “I knew it. I knew we shouldn’t have been digging up information like this. And I was the one who suggested going in the future too. I think I messed him up.”

“Hey, don’t blame yourself,” Amy states a bit sterner, “He just hit a rough patch. Things will smooth out over time, okay? Everyone goes through them.”

“Just... make sure he doesn’t worry about anything, okay?” Sonic tells her, “I don’t want him having to do anything around here. He’s done enough already.” Sonic stops and he takes a breather, “I already dumped the kid on him. And that was before I knew it was *mine*. I didn’t even realize how hard all of this was gunna be. I couldn’t even imagine trying to do all of this alone.”

“He’s in good hands,” Amy reassures with a soothing voice, “He’s going to do nothing but relax. Promise.”

“Thanks, Ames,” Sonic says like he means it, “And sorry for... ya know, me being me. I’m tryin’ to get better at it.”

“It’s okay,” she says with a slight giggle, “I guess that’s what they call tough love.”

“Ugh,” Sonic groans distastefully, “Don’t say it like that.” The sound of the door opening is heard before Sonic says his good-byes to her.

As Shadow hears the padding of Amy’s feet walking toward the kitchen, he moves swiftly back into the bedroom without a sound. He sits on the bed and tries to process everything that was said. His eyes rest fretfully at the empty spot on the bed and thinks about how he made Sonic feel like this was all his fault.

He doesn’t deserve Sonic. He doesn’t deserve him at all. He’s going to drag him down. He’s going to...

There’s a slight knock and Amy is in the doorway with a tray full of food, “I’m so glad you’re awake. Just in time for breakfast in bed.”

Shadow holds his hand up, “No, I’ll go downstairs. Just give me a moment.”

Amy marches in with a forceful happy tone and thrusts Shadow back into a laying position with surprising strength, “I insist.” She unfolds a lap desk with one swift motion and places it above Shadow’s lap, setting the tray on top of it. She places her hands on her hips and smiles down at him, “I’m headed back downstairs, but don’t be afraid to call me if you need anything, okay?”

Shadow sighs in defeat and just nods his head stubbornly. This was humiliating.

He stays in bed and eats though because he knows it’s what Sonic would want. He’s having trouble stomaching it though. Perhaps this was what he needed. Although the extra time to think is not helping at all.

So when he’s done; he gets up, walks into the kitchen, and rinses his plate clean.

“H-hey! What are you doing out of bed! I told you to call me if you need anything,” Amy says, fussing over him.



"I don't need anything," Shadow tells her as he places the plate into the sink, "I'm not ill. I can handle this type of task. I will not interfere in what you're doing." Shadow sits at the table and unfolds the newspaper.

This seems to calm Amy down a bit though, "Oh okay. So... How are you feeling this morning?"

Shadow grumbles under his breath and leaves that as an answer for her to interpret on her own. He doesn't usually mind Amy's company. Quite the opposite, but anyone trying to take care of him unsettles him greatly.

"That bad, huh?" She asks as she snags Silver from the highchair and makes her way over to the table, "Penny for your thoughts?"

Shadow glances over at Silver and can't help but ruffle his little spikes in front, "I'm just trying to give Sonic and Silver a good life and I feel as though I'm failing at that."

Amy gives him a look, "What are you talking about? Sonic's living the good life. I mean, look at this house!"

Shadow doesn't say anything, just flips the page and begins reading the next.

Amy pulls up at seat and rests the baby on her thigh, "Does this have anything to do with what happened to you in the past?"

Shadow's eye twitches and he pulls the paper up like a barrier between them.

Amy makes a noise like she's figured him out, "Oh, I see. Call it women's intuition, but I think I understand what's going on here. You had a not-so-good life so you're trying to make up for that by giving Sonic and Silver everything you've never had. From the looks of it, maybe even more."

Shadow folds the paper in defeat and tosses it to the side, "Please."

"Are you doing all of this as a way of hiding something else? Like, maybe you think that you don't deserve this lifestyle. As a way to cope with all of that you disregard your own health and issues because you feel you're undeserving of happiness. So, you turn to over-providing for your family as a way to deal with those negative feelings," Amy says like it's a question even though they're both acutely aware that it's a statement.

Shadow folds his hands together and rests them on the tabletop as he thinks over her words. When he finally speaks it's in a low murmur, "Do I do that?"

Amy shrugs, "I don't know? Only you can answer that. It's just a suggestion. Maybe you're over loading yourself with responsibilities. Maybe that's why you don't feel so good in the head right now."

"Is this... a bad thing?" He asks carefully.

"Well..." Amy answers with a thoughtful look, "Not always. Sonic is a guy who really needs someone responsible like you to lean on, but... if it's affecting you to an extent that it's leaving you overwhelmed then... Yeah. Relationships are tricky. There's no right or wrong way to have a relationship. You just have to be flexible. Be there for each other when you need to." She giggles a little and rests her fist to her cheek, "And I wouldn't call this a failure by any means. I've seen Sonic take over many times on the battlefield, but I've never seen him take a stand like this when it comes to his own responsibilities. It means he's growing as a person. Sometimes bad things have to happen and in order for life to balance itself out."

“So... By being there for him too much, I’ve been hindering his progress,” Shadow responds with a grim tone.

Amy holds her hands up, “N-no! Don’t think of it like that. In fact, stop thinking. You’re over thinking it. You have to let these things happen naturally. You can’t control everything that happens. Bad things happen, but so do good things. There’s not always a cause for everything.”

“Control...” Shadow mumbles to himself.

“I know! Let’s play a game! I think you need a distraction,” Amy says quickly as she makes her way to the living area where a few board games are tucked away in the corner.

“I do have a favor to ask,” Shadow projects his voice over to her.

“Yes?” She asks cheerfully, holding the box of battleship.

“Could you possibly read me my fortune as you did for Blaze?” Shadow asks nervously.

“Oh sure,” she responds with a peppy tone as she makes her way back over to the table, “Don’t get too crazy with it though. Try to think of it like... advice. If Sonic found out I was doing this he’d probably flip.”

“Those cards are how you knew to take a jog around our neighborhood this morning,” Shadow states, “You could sense something was amiss.”

Amy stops in her tracks when she hears that and asks, “Were you spying on us?”

Shadow looks away with a frown, “I... needed to know how Sonic was this morning.”

She gives him a disturbed look before placing the board game down, “Shadow... You shouldn’t do that. No wonder you’re a wreck.”

“I know it’s wrong,” Shadow whispers, “I just can’t help it. I want to protect him.”

Amy sighs and takes a seat, “It’s okay. I feel the same way sometimes. I just feel like I’m oddly connected with Sonic somehow. More than others. I can’t explain it.”

“Connected?” Shadow lifts his head up a bit when he hears that, “As if it’s a bond.”

Amy blushes and lifts her hands to her face, “I shouldn’t be having this conversation with you!”

“I feel that way with Omega and Silver,” Shadow responds, completely missing Amy’s meaning.

“Huh?” She looks up with confusion.

“My DNA resides in them so I feel close to them. Like a familial bond,” Shadow explains, “I believe it has to do with the hive mind of the Black Arms, but I’m not sure. I can feel it’s presence a bit weaker with Chocola as well since he’s also bonded with me.”

“Do you feel that with Sonic?” Amy asks curiously.

“No,” Shadow shakes his head, “His genetic makeup is different. On top of him being from a different timeline, it’s hard to sense him or anything he does.”

Amy’s eyes light up, “Oh! I’m from that timeline you’re talking about!”

Shadow looks baffled, “What?”

“Oh yeah! Metal came to my timeline and captured me, bringing me into this future. Sonic followed him in order to save me,” Amy explains with a smile.

“And you never went back,” Shadow concluded.

Amy shrugs, “How could we? Eggman had the Time Stones. That and we were young. I didn’t know anything about time travel. Everything just felt normal to us. We didn’t go so far into the future that it was noticeable.”

Shadow glances down with a pensive look.

Amy waves her hands, “Oh gosh! What am I doing!? I’m supposed to be helping you distract yourself!” She opens the box and sets up the game for them.

Shadow watches Amy set up the game and can’t stop looking at her green eyes. Was it possible she was either an experiment too or somehow a descendant of Chaos? Was Amy related to Sonic somehow? He doesn’t ask any more questions though because his head already feels full with information.

So, the game begins. Shadow is very calculative with where he chooses to place his pieces. Their games are very close each time, but Shadow ends up winning them all. He’s very strategic with each choice he makes and he’s getting very good at reading Amy’s reactions. Although, she does put up a good challenge. It was a good way for him to distract himself for a few hours at least.

Although, Silver starts to get fussy and Shadow ends up taking him when he sees his grabby hands. The child falls asleep headfirst in his chest while Shadow is focusing in on the game. Amy is trying not to laugh at the sight of it.

“Wow, it’s almost like you know where my pieces are each time,” Amy comments as she begins to put the box back together.

Shadow shakes his head, “I assure you. I did not cheat. Although, you’re very perceptive yourself.”

“Oh stop,” Amy waves her hand and slips the top of the box back in place.

“You’re a worthy opponent,” Shadow smirks as he readjusts Silver against his shoulder so he can cross his leg over his other.

“Coming from you, I’m sure that’s a compliment,” Amy laughs as she goes to place the box back into the corner.

“I was serious about your reading,” Shadow tells her.

“Only if you’re sure,” Amy says as he grabs her purse.

Shadow just nods to her.

Amy sits back down and begins to shuffle her deck. She hums a little tune before placing them one-by-one on the table top. She begins to flip each over one-by-one and by the third one her smile turns into a frown. “Wait a minute...” She flips the others over and laughs a bit sheepishly, “I must not have shuffled these well enough. Hold on.” She places them back in place and shuffles them really good this time. She places them on the table one-by-one like last time and flips over the first card with a shocked look.

“What’s the matter?” Shadow asks like he doesn’t understand.

Amy flips all of the cards over and gasps, “This is the same reading I gave Blaze. This is so strange. I’ve never had this happen before. I swore I shuffled them.”

She did. Shadow saw her. He glances down at the cards and eyes the last one. The same one Blaze was concerned about.

*Death.*

“Maybe this isn’t the best thing,” Amy announces overly cheery, “How about we watch a movie instead? I’ll see what you’ve got!”

Shadow furrows his brow. He glances down at Silver and notices that the child is awake. He’s quiet and hyper focused on something. Shadow’s never seen the kid so quiet and focused before. He follows his eyes down and along his shadow. He blinks a few times when he sees a figure within it, but the image dissipates the moment his he lays eyes on it.

He feels Silver grasp onto him a bit tighter and he in turn holds the child closer to his chest. He gets up and walks over to the living room, very aware of his shadow following him. Shadow hushes the child in his arms and smooths his stiff quills down soothingly.

Amy pops in a movie and they sit on the couch. Shadow knows he should be trying to distract himself and relax, but it’s hard. It feels like every time his eyes drift back to the tv the shadow gets closer and closer to him.

It’s just his imagination. It has to be.

Sonic gets home a few hours later with a huge smile on his face. He scoops Silver into his arms and tosses him in the air playfully a few times, laughing with him. He leans down and gives Shadow a kiss and glances over at Amy, “How was everything?”

“Relaxing,” Amy states with her arms behind her head for emphasis.

“Sweet!” Sonic says in response, “I brought dinner home!” He marches over to the table and places the takeout on the table.

“I’m going to head out,” Amy informs him, “but I’ll be back tomorrow.”

Shadow kind of tunes out their good-byes as he glances out the window. The sun is going down and he doesn’t know why that strikes fear into his heart.

“Shads! Earth to Shads! Dinner!” Sonic calls out to him.

He vaguely hears it and pulls himself up from the couch. He makes his way across the living room and he actively tries to ignore how when he walks past the hallway, his shadow is running down it. He moves his stiff limbs over to the table and sits down.

Sonic pulls out the food as he tries to lighten the mood, “I’m so mad. I went into work and my favorite comic totally got cancelled. I wanted to read it so bad. I had to try and find something else to read.” As Sonic sits down, he looks between Shadow and Silver and frowns. It’s deathly quiet. Sonic goes to ruffle Silver’s quills, but the child shies away. Sonic turns to Shadow and asks, “Hey, is everything alright?”

Shadow doesn’t answer. He’s staring at the wall. In fact, both Shadow and Silver are staring at the

wall.

Sonic stands up and walks in front of Shadow to get his attention, but Shadow pushes him back and away from the wall. “Dude, what’s your problem? I thought you had a relaxing day,” Sonic states with confusion.

Shadow stands, “I’m not hungry. I’m going to bed.” He stalks away from the kitchen and up the stairs.

Sonic’s face drops when he sees this, but he doesn’t stop him. He glances down at Silver who looks a little more comfortable. He looks back up at the hallway and frowns when he whispers to himself, “What’s goin’ on with you, Shads?”

Sonic doesn’t want to bother him just in case he really is just tired and needs rest. A part of him wonders if Shadow is upset with him, but he’s not going to jump the gun. Instead, he hangs out with Silver until it’s time for bed and puts the child to sleep. Since Silver is a bit more skittish tonight, Sonic sings him his little lullaby as he watches his tired eyes fall shut. He tucks him in, kisses his forehead, and slips out of the room.

Sonic walks into the bedroom and sees Shadow laying in bed turned away on his side. He frowns and doesn’t push it. He just lays down on the opposite side of the bed and tries not to heavy think before sleep washes over him.

Shadow finds a little bit of comfort in Sonic’s minimal presence although he doesn’t want to get close. He can feel it. Something is with them in the room and he doesn’t want it anywhere near Sonic. He finds himself slowly drifting off, but it’s interrupted by pattering footsteps on the ground. Small quick steps like a child’s.

Shadow pulls himself up as his eyes dart across the room. He hears giggling. “Silver?” He whispers under his breath. From the corner of his eye he sees a figure run out of the room, but his eyes aren’t quick enough to catch the form.

Shadow glances down at Sonic who is fast asleep and carefully gets out of bed. As he reaches the door, he hears more. Giggling and pattering footsteps. There’s no way it’s Silver. He can’t walk and there’s multiple voices coming from different directions.

Shadow holds his head and closes his eyes. No, he wasn’t going crazy. He wasn’t hearing voices. He must be dreaming. This was a dream.

“Father?”

Shadow’s head snaps up when he hears the voice. It’s high pitched and eerie. It sends a shiver up his spine. He takes a step out into the hallway and the floor is like black tar and oil. He keeps his hand on the wall for support as he makes his way into the baby’s room.

The giggling get louder and more and more voices join in like their multiplying. Shadow tries to will his feet to go faster, anxiety gripping at his heart because he’s fearful for Silver’s safety, but his feet keep sinking into the sticky, black tar on the ground. “This is a dream,” Shadow murmurs to himself, “That’s the only explanation for this.”

As Shadow walks into the room, he sees dozens of small figures scatter across the floor like insects fleeing the light of day. Shadow grits his teeth, moving faster and freeing himself from the tarry ground. He makes his way over to Silver and looks down at the child with relief when he sees him sleeping soundly.

Shadow's ear twitches when he hears a creak. Back and forth. He glances over at the rocking chair in the corner. It rocks with an eerie movement of someone sitting in it, but no one is there. Shadow glances up at the ceiling and sees all of the figures gathered above, giggling as they look down.

Shadow grabs Silver from his crib and cradles him in his arms as he slowly backs away. Each step he takes, the figures crawl down the ceiling and onto the walls, closer and closer to him. "Stay back," Shadow warns with fear and anger.

They giggle and cackle more as they continue to make their way across the carpet.

The rocking chair creaks louder and this time Mephiles is sitting in it, his green eyes glowing in the darkness. "We just want to play," he speaks with a sinister laugh.

"Get out of my home," Shadow growls.

"That's not nice," Mephiles says as he gets up, taking stiff doll-like steps over to Shadow, "I just want to play with my brother." The little black figures giggle louder at Mephiles' words.

"You have no business with this child," Shadow grits out, backing away one step at a time.

"So serious all the time," Mephiles mocks as he walks up to Shadow, looking deep into his eyes, "You should learn to relax."

Shadow whips his hand out to strike Mephiles, but he forms into mist and dissipates into the air. "What are you?" Shadow asks with anger.

"I'm you... and Sonic... and Chaos," Mephiles says playfully as he forms into a puddle on the ground and regains his original form, "Or... The data Sonic could gather. I'm missing a few pieces, but... even broken dolls can find love, right?"

"You were created using Metal Sonic's data," Shadow whispers, horrified by the fact.

"Does it matter?" Mephiles asks, "I'm still part of you. You can feel my presence. I know you can."

"How did you...?" Shadow asks.

Mephiles doesn't let him finish. Just laughs hard as the small creatures giggle with him. "I am water and I am air. I am just ash, taking refuge in your shadow. I am in your lungs. I am in your bloodstream. I can see every path you've taken and every one you could have taken," Mephiles goes on, "I could be everything you chose not to be."

"Why are you doing this?" Shadow demands.

"Does it matter?" Mephiles asks as he looks at Shadow through his eyebrows, "Do I need a reason? I'm just doing whatever comes natural."

Shadow takes a step back, "This is anything but natural."

"Yet here I am," Mephiles remarks with a laugh, "Yet here... I am..." He takes small steps forward and says, "You and that copy are very focused on the authenticity of life forms. Yet you're copies of your past selves. Made by man. Just because I'm incomplete... doesn't make me any less real." Mephiles lifts his hand and places it on Shadow's forehead.

Shadow feels the burning of it and tries to back away.

Silver cries out and there's a burst of energy. The light from the chaos energy causes Mephiles and

all of the smaller creatures to disappear into a puff of smoke.

The light turns on suddenly and Sonic rushes into the room, "Shadow, what are you doing!?"

Shadow is still stunned in place and doesn't even register Sonic taking the child from him and putting him back into his crib.

"Go back to bed," Sonic orders with anger.

Shadow nods and slowly walks back to the bedroom almost zombie-like. He's having trouble processing what had happened. He collapses onto the bed and has no idea if what he saw was real or not. Was he sleepwalking? Was that a dream? What was going on with him?

Sonic walks in moments later and flicks the lights on. He shuts the door and sits on the bed. He glares down at Shadow and says, "Tell me what's going on."

"I don't know," Shadow murmurs, still turned away from him.

"Sorry, Shads," Sonic states as he pulls Shadow toward him so he can see his face, "That's not gunna cut it anymore. You need to talk to me about this."

"I saw something," Shadow whispers like he's confused about what he even saw, "Figures at the corner of my vision. And... Mephiles. I saw Mephiles."

"Mephiles?" Sonic questions, "Where? Where was he?"

"He's... He was in Silver's room. He's in my shadow," Shadow explains like he's trying to sort it out, "I think he's inside me."

Sonic blinks a few times before looking away.

"He's manipulating what I see," Shadow goes on to explain, "I don't know if it's there or not."

"Are you seeing things, Shadow?" Sonic asks with a look of terror on his face.

"I'm not sure," Shadow responds, "It's so real."

Sonic shakes his head and grits his teeth, "I knew we shouldn't have gone to the future. Why did I think that would solve anything?"

"I think he wants Iblis' soul," Shadow goes on to say.

"Stop," Sonic says roughly, "Just stop, Shadow."

Shadow glances at Sonic like he doesn't understand.

"Don't go into Silver's room at night anymore, okay? If you see anything just wake me up. Talk to *me* about it. We'll get through this," Sonic explains like he's tired and distressed.

Shadow doesn't say anything. He just feels worse.

Sonic slides his hand over to Shadow's and squeezes it, whispering one more time for his own reassurance, "We'll get through this."

# To Prison Island!

## Chapter Notes

I'm just letting you guys know that these upcoming chapters are going to be cut kind of weird. But like, when I wrote this, I wrote it as one gigantic chapter and I really don't want to post it that way. So, it will be broken up into different parts.

Hope you enjoy!



## Chapter Eighteen: To Prison Island!

Shadow doesn't get much sleep. Although he's glad the sounds had lulled to a minimal. It all goes away when the sun comes up, but he stays in bed. Even after Sonic leaves and Amy arrives. He stays in bed. He lets the breakfast go cold and untouched and he just lays there. Staring at the ceiling. Contemplating.

More and more pressure is put on his heart and he feels all of the emotions he hates all at once. He thinks about all of his mistakes. All of his wrongdoings. What could have become of him if he'd gone through with them. He thinks about the blood on his hands. The uncontrollable monster he's become.

He's bogged down and paralyzed by these thoughts and they won't go away. He almost doesn't



want them to go away. He wants to feel them. He wants to feel this turmoil for justice. For the people he's wronged. He should feel this way. He deserves it.

Was he really expecting a full life after all of that?

Sonic walks in the door and glances around. He sees Amy on the sofa with Silver in her arms as she mindlessly scrolls through her phone. "Hey," Sonic greets her with a half-smile, "Shadow go to bed early?"

Amy turns to him with a frown, "He never left his room."

Sonic sits down on the couch next to her and gives her a nervous look, "What should I do?"

"I'm not sure, Sonic," Amy says with a shrug, "It might be time you get him some help,"

"I don't wanna make him do anything he doesn't want to..." Sonic trails off quietly.

"I know," she nods, "It's a tough decision."

"Maybe I'll give it one more day..." Sonic murmurs like he's afraid to even wait that long. When the sun starts to go down that's when things get weird.

"That's fine," Amy replies, "I'll come for as long as you need me."

"I know," Sonic says with a sad appreciation, "Thanks..."

"Of course," Amy says with a smile, "I know you'd do the same for me." She hands Silver over and gathers her things together.

Sonic sees her out and when the door closes, the house is quiet. It's like he can hear every little creaking floorboard and every shutter of the windows. Without Shadow this home is so cold and barren. He doesn't know how much more of this he can take. It's unsettling.

He has to put some music on in order to relax and he reads Silver a few bedtime stories just to hear his little squeals of happiness. He dreads having to put Silver to bed though. He shouldn't, but he does.

After the child is all tucked in, Sonic makes his way into the bedroom. He sees Shadow laying on his back, eyes focused on the ceiling. His gaze is a million miles away like no one's home. It makes Sonic feel a little sick to see.

He swallows his emotions back and takes a seat on the bed, starting up a conversation anyway, "Always seems like it gets busy every time a new super hero movie comes out."

Shadow doesn't even blink.

Sonic's smile falters a little, but he keeps going, "Must be a new trend or somethin'. I remember a few years back you'd be made fun of for liking stuff like this."

Shadow turns his head to look at the hero and a small flame of hope flickers in Sonic's chest. Shadow's hand slides up Sonic's thigh and he whispers, "I want your body."

Sonic's breath hitches in his throat when he hears that. He feels his cheeks flush a little and he leans in a bit closer. "Yeah?" He asks, a bit teasingly.

"Yes," Shadow murmurs as his hand slides up to his chest, feeling the steady heartbeat, "You're so

warm and soft.”

“Did you miss me?” Sonic asks with a smirk as he crawls on top of Shadow and straddles his hips.

“Very much so,” Shadow responds, eyes deep and focused on him, “There are so many things I want to do to you.”

Sonic looks interested. He leans down and kisses him before whispering, “Tell me.”

“Your skin,” Shadow’s brows crease as he digs his fingers into the pale flesh of hips and torso, “I want to mark it. Press my fingertips into it like a bruised imprint.”

Sonic licks his lips and soaks in Shadow’s words, “Go on.” He gasps and croons when he feels Shadow’s rough fingers against him. He winces a little because he’s being a little rougher than he’s used to.

Shadow slides his hands up Sonic’s chest and lets his fingers wrap around his neck loosely, “Your delicate neck...” Shadow shudders as he feels the pulse there, “I could snap it in an instant.”

Sonic looks down at Shadow a bit warily, but he doesn’t question it. He just tries to roll with it, “You know me, I like it rough.”

Shadow pants out and laughs lowly in his chest, “I want to listen to your final gasped breaths. I want to listen to your heart dull down. I want to watch the life drain from your eyes.”

Sonic blinks and moves away a little, “What?”

Shadow flips Sonic over and pins him against the mattress, whispering in his ear, “I thought you liked it rough.”

Sonic gasps. He looks around frantically and rubs his neck. It isn’t sore. He swallows and jumps a little when his alarm goes off. The sun is coming in through the blinds and Sonic is slowly starting to realize that was all just a dream. A really weird, messed up dream.

Maybe all of this craziness was starting to rub off on him.

He looks over his shoulder and notices that the bed is empty. The sheets and blankets skewed and draped across the side like there was some kind of struggle.

Sonic gets up quickly and rushes into Silver’s room. The baby is still sleeping peacefully in the crib. He scoops up the child and makes his way down the hallway, “Shadow?”

There’s no answer. The house is quiet.

Sonic quickens his steps and makes his way into the living room. He feels the wind rush against his feet and he looks up to see the front door open. “Oh no...” Sonic runs to the front door and sees Shadow’s bike is gone, “Oh no!” Sonic rushes back inside and looks around frantically.

What should he do? Where should he go?

Sonic grabs the baby harness and hooks it onto himself so he can place Silver inside as he jets out the door as fast as his legs can carry him.

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“Embrace it.”

“Why do you resist?”

“You know there’s a sadist deep down inside you.”

“Let it free.”

“Give up your shackles.”

“Get a good taste of freedom.”

Shadow’s stopped listening to the voices awhile back. He marches with solid, purposeful steps. He needs to do this. There was no other way. If he lets this go any longer it’ll get worse.

He makes his way into the GUN HQ building and walks down the halls.

“You know you want this.”

“There’s no other feeling like it.”

“Embrace the darkness.”

Shadow makes his way into the commander’s office and just stares at him.

“Shadow?” The commander looks legitimately confused to see him, “I didn’t expect you back so soon.”

Shadow closes the door and makes his way over to the desk. His eyes are focused and stoic when he says, “Call your men and have me detained.”

The commander folds his arms across his chest, “What is all of this about?”

“Call your men,” Shadow states with a growl.

“I suggest you go home before I write you up for insubordination and failing to show up to your assigned shifts, agent Shadow,” the commander orders with a hard stare.

Shadow glances down at the commander’s holster and then back up at him. He snaps his arm up and reaches across the desk. His fingers curl around the cool metal of the gun and aims it at the man, “Call you men, now! I’m not playing games with you. Have them arrest me and take me to Prison Island so they can place my body into stasis.”

The commander doesn’t budge. He stands his ground and glares down at Shadow, “You wouldn’t shoot me.”

“Perhaps,” Shadow states before turning the gun to his temple, “but if you don’t detain me, *I’ll* do it. Permanently.”

The commander’s lip curls, “You wouldn’t.”

Shadow switches the gun’s safety off and loads the bullet into the barrel, “I’m not joking.”

The commander opens his mouth, but then closes it. He closes his eyes and there’s a slight tinge of vulnerability. He lets out a disappointed sigh before pressing the button on his intercom, “I need... I need a squadron and an aircraft at the ready. Shadow the Hedgehog... must be arrested and detained on Prison Island immediately.” He looks like he hates himself for doing it.

“Thank you for your cooperation, commander,” Shadow says with appreciation as he faces the door and waits.

“It doesn’t have to be like this, Shadow,” the commander tries to say.

“It does,” Shadow states with a hard tone, “There is no other way.”

The men barrel into the room and shout for Shadow to drop his weapon. Shadow complies, tosses the gun on the ground, and sliding it to the side with his foot. He holds his hands up in surrender as the men cuff him and carry him off.

The commander gives Shadow a mournful look before shaking his head.

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Sonic skids to a stop and taps his foot. Tails had no idea what he was talking about. He searched the entirety of the Mystic Ruins. He texted Rouge an hour ago. He’s currently searching Station Square, but he’s about to give up and head to the next town over.

Silver babbles and blows little bubbles and Sonic looks up when he sees Amy and Blaze running toward him.

Sonic meets them halfway, “I’m so glad I ran into you! Shadow’s...”

“We already know,” Amy explains.

“Wait, what?” Sonic asks with confusion.

Amy pulls out her phone and hands it to him.

Sonic watches the screen and his lungs stop working for a second. It’s a video of GUN soldiers hauling Shadow away onto a helicopter. Sonic grits his teeth and hands the phone back, “What the heck does GUN think they’re doing!? I gotta get down there pronto!” The blue hero zips away behind a trail of dust.

“W-wait! I can’t run that fast!” Amy shouts out to him.

“May I?” Blaze requests.

“Oh, uh... what?” Amy is confused until she’s being picked up by Blaze and they’re darting away quickly. They aren’t as fast as Sonic, but Blaze is fast enough that she can trail him.

Sonic gets to HQ and kicks the doors open in a dramatic fashion causing a scene, “I want answers!”

The people inside just look at each other like they don’t understand what he’s talking about, but it isn’t a moment later that Rouge bursts through the crowd, knocking everyone over like bowling pins in order to meet with the hero, “I’m so glad you’re here, big blue! I have no idea what’s going on! All information on the incident is classified and I can’t find any leads.”

The people that are pulling themselves back onto their feet get knocked over again when Omega busts through right after, “I will not stand for this. Will destroy anyone who gets in the way of rescuing Shadow the Hedgehog.”

Rouge grabs Omega’s head plate and hushes him, “That’s our objective, but we can’t tell anyone yet.”

Sonic cracks his knuckles and pushes past the two, “Oh, I’m gettin’ to the bottom of this. I’m gunna ask the head honcho himself.”

Amy and Blaze arrive a moment later and Amy is looking away and blushing when Blaze places her back on her feet. The two follow Sonic as he marches through the place and Rouge and Omega follow suit.

Sonic is aware of how ridiculous he looks bursting into the commander’s office with a baby slung to his front, but he doesn’t much care. He’s pissed.

“Yo, commander! Explain now or I’ll make my fists do the talkin’,” Sonic shouts as he points to the man at the desk.

The commander has his head hung and his fingers neatly knitted together. He glances over at the hero with a frown and looks away.

“You can’t be here!” Topaz yells as she makes her way through. She holds her arms up like a barrier and says, “I’m sorry that they skated by security!”

Rouge takes front and center this time, “Oh-ho no, toots. Back off. You’re the one overstepping your boundaries.”

“Excuse me?” Topaz with flustered anger.

“Enough,” the commander says with a defeated look. He makes his way toward the door and stops before stating, “I left the keys to one of the choppers on the desk. What you decide to do with them is up to you. My hands are tied, but as far as I’m concerned I never saw you come in here.”

“B-but, sir!” Topaz tries to say, but he’s already walking out.

Rouge snags the keys and tosses them at Topaz, “I hope you can run your mouth as well as you can fly one of these.”

Topaz juggles with the keys until she gets a good grip on them, “Of course I can fly one. My job description requires it, but I’m not going to—“

“Oh, yes you are, Commander Topaz,” Sonic says impatiently as he carts her out the door.

“C-c-commander!?” She shouts with shock as they make their way down the hall.

“Yep, consider it a promotion,” Sonic responds, wasting no time, “Say good-bye to GUN and welcome aboard the Freedom Fighters. We play by my rules now.”

Topaz does help them sneak by security. Skittishly. Fearful of losing her job. Although, she’s sure the commander has lost his damn mind about now. So, maybe she shouldn’t worry about it. Then again, she is sneaking Sonic and his friends into restricted areas, taking them onto a government owned chopper, and planning on breaking into a prison to free a criminal. Yeah, said criminal is someone she worked with, but it’s all still so messed up.

“My body is perfect for sneaking unauthorized personnel into highly restricted areas,” Omega states as Sonic, Amy, and Blaze hang onto his back out of sight.

“And you’re doin’ a great job, buddy. Keep it up,” Sonic snickers as he pats the robot’s back.

“I am obligated to feel flattered by the blue hedgehog’s comment,” Omega replies.

Sonic smirks and asks, “Why’s that?”

“Shadow’s DNA. Comments like that make my mechanic insides feel like fluttery butterflies,” Omega responds.

Rouge is trying not to die of laughter.

Topaz begs like she’s dreading every word being uttered, “You do realize this is supposed to be a stealth mission. Please, refrain from talking.”

“Yes,” Blaze chimes in, “It’s prudent we remain quiet so we don’t get caught, Sonic.”

“My bad. My bad,” Sonic responds with a hushed whisper.

Topaz heads out first and sees two soldiers guarding the chopper. She frowns and motions for Rouge to follow her. The two sneak off around back and without being detected, strike a blow to the backs of their heads rendering them unconscious.

Topaz cringes as she helps Rouge carry the men out of sight as to not attract any attention, “I cannot believe I just knocked out my own team mates.”

“Yeah, well, get used to it, hon,” Rouge states with a frown, “It won’t be the last. Trust me.”

The two hop into the chopper and Topaz gets it up and running. She signals for the others to come and Omega quickly carts them over. The three hop inside, but Omega remains outside.

“Looks like you exceed the weight limit, big boy,” Rouge comments teasingly.

“I will follow close behind,” Omega responds as his back unfolds out into a jetpack, “I will obliterate anyone who gets in the way of my escort mission.”

“Just... Just immobilize them. *Please*, don’t kill anyone,” Topaz begs.

Omega remains quiet for a moment before replying, “I will do as you say.” He turns away as his jetpack begins to ignite before adding, “I am not obligated to like the request.”

Sonic places some small ear protector muffs on Silver’s ears and points ahead of them, “To Prison Island!”

Rouge stifles her laughter and points in the opposite direction, “Prison Island is behind us, sweetie.”

“Oh,” Sonic’s finger goes limp for a moment before correcting his stance, “To Prison Island!”

Amy buries her head in her hands and sighs.

# Rescue Mission



## Chapter Nineteen: Rescue Mission

Shadow gets a wave of nostalgia and dread the moment he walks into the room where the stasis chamber is. He remembers it well. He remembers being locked inside and he remembers when the doctor released him.

This time, he wants it. He doesn't mind. He actually welcomes shutting off his mind so he doesn't have to deal with these night terrors anymore. He's so tired.

The one thing he will miss though are his friends. And his family. He keeps telling himself it's for the best. He can't bring any harm to them. Even if that harm is coming from him.

He feels the barrel of the semiautomatic stab into his back and he grimaces at the rookie he once trained awhile back. He's still an asshole. He's more upset these people will be the last things he sees before he goes under.

"I knew it was only a matter of time until you turned on us," the man states with an ugly smirk as he stabs the barrel of his gun into his back again.

Shadow's too tired to fight. He doesn't want to. He's accepted his fate. There was no other outcome he could see. Not only would he be protecting humans from himself, but Iblis' soul would be heavily guarded. It was a win-win.

He climbs into the chamber and closes his eyes. He'd rather see darkness and nothingness than this. Sonic pops into his mind with baby Silver in his arms and he smiles peacefully as the container

closes shut.

“Not so fast.”

“We’re not done here.”

“The show is just getting started.”

Shadow’s eyes widen, feeling a shift inside him. No, he didn’t want to fight. He didn’t want to fight this. So, why were his palms braced against the glass and pushing the chamber open?

“Did you forget?”

“You’re under my control.”

“I am Chaos.”

“I have his soul.”

“And now I will also be Iblis.”

“You lost the moment I fused with your body.”

“I thank you, Shadow the Hedgehog.”

The chamber door slides open and Shadow feels all of the air leave his lungs at once. A mist. A shadow of Mephiles fades out of Shadow like a duplicate image of himself. Shadow lays in the chamber unable to move as he looks up at Mephiles.

Mephiles holds his hand out and strikes each soldier with precision right in their hearts, killing them all in an instant. Their corpses fall against the metallic ground with a thud.

Mephiles turns to Shadow and looks down at him. The green glow of his chest radiates as he holds the red gemstone that should be in Shadow’s head. “There is no protecting anyone from me,” Mephiles states with amusement, “You just sealed your own fate. Your negative energy... it sustains me. You’re an overflowing cup of dark thoughts and it’s helped me create a solidified form. I couldn’t have done any of this without you.”

“D-don’t...” Shadow tries to say, but his body is growing weak.

“But I must. I must become whole again. I desire to be one with Iblis,” Mephiles snickers to him, “Like two perfect pieces coming together. You’ve felt that desire... I know you have because I’ve seen it.”

Shadow reaches his hand up, but feels his vision getting blurred. His body was becoming unstable. He can feel his body dying all around him.

“I won’t make you suffer anymore,” Mephiles states as he closes the chamber door, “I’m not that heartless.”

The last thing Shadow manages to see is Mephiles dissipate into a cloud of smoke as his evil cackles echo through the metallic room.

Then, darkness.



“If I land the chopper it’ll bring way too much attention onto us,” Topaz explains through her microphone.

“No need,” Sonic responds as he gets to his feet, “This is our stop.”

“We can’t just rush in there without a plan,” Amy interjects.

“I gotta plan,” Sonic tells her, “We bust through the place and snag Shadow.”

Rouge places a hand on his shoulder, “I’m with pinky on this one.” She turns to Topaz as she’s hooking up a device to her ear and states, “I’m going with them so you’re going to need to hack into the system and give us visuals via the security cameras. Do you think you can do that?”

“I um...” Topaz says like she’s unsure.

“You *can* tap into the cameras, right?” Rouge asks with an impatient look.

“I can... but they’d be able to trace the signal,” Topaz tries to explain.

“Probably,” Rouge responds with a bored look, “but by the time they do we’ll be well on our way to Shadow. It’s a risk we’re going to have to take.”

Topaz just nods to her.

“Good,” Rouge says as she grabs Sonic by the wrists and flies him out of the chopper as Blaze and Amy hop onto Omega.

When they land, Sonic hops down onto the grassy ground and places his hands on his hips, “I coulda jumped that.”

“I don’t doubt it,” Rouge says with a smirk, “but don’t forget you’re carrying precious cargo with you.”

Sonic seems confused until he looks down at Silver and then away a bit sheepishly.

“Okay. Rouge and I will lead the way since we know the facility the best,” Amy announces, “Omega and Blaze will act as our heavy hitters in case we run into trouble.”

Sonic taps his foot on the ground, “What? I don’t get any fun?”

“You can pick up the slack,” Amy teases with a giggle.

“Oh, I get it. You rescue me from Prison Island *one time* and you think I can’t handle it,” Sonic states snottily, “And for the record, I got myself caught on purpose.”

“Let’s go with Amy’s plan,” Rouge interrupts with a smirk.

“Affirmative,” Omega pipes up as he transforms his hand into weapons, “Will shoot to kill if any hostiles try to attack the blue one and baby Shadow.”

“You are in good hands, sir,” Blaze confirms.

“Ugh! Talk about embarrassing,” Sonic rolls his eyes, “Alright. Let’s just go.”

Rouge is the one to sneak in on the guard at the front and knocks him unconscious. She pulls out a device and hooks it up to the screen on the door. She furrows her brow as she tries to make

something happen, but it doesn't look good.

"Everything alright?" Sonic asks curiously.

"Not really. It seems GUN's updated their security programs and I can't tap in," Rouge turns to him with a frown, "They know me too well. This door is Rouge proof."

"May I?" Amy asks as she walks up to the door.

Rouge steps to the side and lets her through.

"Oh really," Sonic places his hands on his hips, "If a government agent with the specialty of hacking into places can't hack into this door, what makes you think you—"

It isn't a second later Amy is sliding a cardkey into the device and the doors slide open. She sends Sonic a snarky look, "I got it from the agent Rouge knocked out. I got in this place the same way last time."

Sonic watches the door with awe before giving her a disgusted look, "Don't talk to me or my son ever again."

He marches into the door after Rouge and Amy follows behind, "You're welcome."

With Rouge's lead and Topaz's directions, they're able to get through the first four floors undetected. It's when the transmission goes out and there's a security breach when things head for the worst. Mechs pile onto the scene and Blaze and Omega open fire holding nothing back.

Sonic sees the door closing, attempting to lock them in and he dashes for it. He uses everything he's got to try and hold it open, "C'mon, guys! We have a bigger problem!"

Blaze sees Sonic and immediately comes to his aid, prying the door open wider and holding it above her head.

The others see the problem and head for the door and Blaze lets the door slam shut when the mechs attempt to follow after them. They run down a grated platform, hanging over the cells to the prisoners on the island.

Sonic is in lead, rushing to grab the door like last time, but a flying drone comes down and fires. It hits the area right in front of him and he's unable to skid to a stop at the momentum he's going. He falls through the hole, barely missing the ledge.

His eyes widen when he sees Amy grabbing his hand and he shouts to her, "H-hey, let go or we'll both fall!"

Her arm shakes a little and her hand slides inch-by-inch off the metal railing, "I won't... let go...!" He gasps when her hand slips and she can feel the rush of wind from Rouge's wings. She feels Rouge's fingers just graze at the collar of her shirt and she falls down the pit with Sonic.

It's not a moment later they're surrounded by GUN mechs and drones. Rouge, Blaze, and Omega glue their backs to one another and face their opponents.

"Will they be alright?" Blaze asks frantically to Rouge.

"They're going to have to be," Rouge states with seething rage, "Our hands are full here."

The lower level is dark and unlike the floor above them, the sirens aren't blaring. Sonic slowly opens

his eyes and sees a soft teal glow. It's surrounding his body along with Amy's.

"Are you doing this?" Amy asks in awe.

"No," Sonic answers as he glances down at Silver. The child's quills are fluttering like there's a slight breeze and his inhibitors are glowing.

The glow fades and the two land safely on their feet.

"Wow, I've never seen anything like that," Amy states.

"Something similar happened when Shadow and I combined our powers, but from the looks of it Silver has a better hang of it," Sonic says with an impressed look, "Good job, kiddo."

The child just looks tired and cranky.

"What do we do now?" Amy asks as she looks up from where they've fallen, "Think we can get back up there?"

"I doubt it," Sonic tells her, "Besides, we're supposed to be going down. So, we're headed in the right direction."

"I've never been this far down before," Amy admits, "I have no idea where Shadow is being held at."

"I hate to admit it," Sonic confesses, "but neither do I. The last person that went this far down was..." He trails off when he hears familiar laughter. He turns his body so Silver's light shines in front of him and he sees where it's coming from, "Eggman!"

The doctor is behind a heavily secure cell with his wrists bound in handcuffs, "It's nice to see you again, old friend."

"The feeling *isn't* mutual," Amy responds with disgust.

Sonic looks down at the cuffs on Eggman's wrists and then back up at him. He doesn't know why, but the scene disturbs him. He doesn't like Eggman a whole lot, but he doesn't like seeing anyone bound like this. He finds himself gravitating toward the cell.

"Sonic, don't!" Amy shouts as she grabs his arm.

"What's wrong, Sonic?" Eggman smirks, "Does this go against everything you stand for? Shadow put me here. You know, before you tried to kill me... three years ago."

Sonic swallows and looks away in shame.

"You're the last person who should be making anyone feel guilty," Amy retorts, "You put yourself in that cell! You tormented the earth so many times and it's your fault we're all in danger right now!"

Eggman glances down at the child as a wide smile spreads across his face, "It must have something to do with *that*, I'm sure." He places his hands on the bars of his cell and bargains, "Let's make a deal. Let me go and I'll escort you to the stasis capsule."

"You know I can't do that," Sonic says with a wavering look like he's almost considering it.

"Can't you?" Eggman asks as he goes on, "Isn't freedom the thing you always stand for?"

Amy rolls her eyes, “Don’t listen to him. He’s a madman. We can find Shadow on our own.”

Eggman holds his hand out through the bars like he’s ready to shake on it.

Sonic lifts his hand, but stops himself. He looks down at Silver and gives Eggman a broken look, “I can’t. I really can’t. I already have my evidence that you’ll never change unless you’re gambling with your own life. I’m sorry, Eggman. I wish things could be different.” Sonic turns and walks away, but he doesn’t know why it’s the hardest thing he’s ever had to do.

As they get down to the next floor, Amy shudders, “What a creep! Can you believe that guy?”

He can’t. He wishes there were a way to redeem him, but he’ll stay here. Planning his life away like his grandfather. He’ll become a great scientist like Gerald and even surpass him, but the outcome will be just a bleak. Although, the timeline Silver’s from will never align with theirs because Sonic knows the truth and he’ll stop it from happening.

Sonic stops when he hears the whirling sounds of cameras down the halls. He’s not really sure which corridor to go down. They don’t have a lot of time to waste trying to figure it out either. If those cameras pick up that they’re down here, it could lead to a total lockdown of the facility. It’ll be even harder to navigate.

Silver fusses in his harness as his arms reach out frantically toward the last hallway. Sonic ruffles his quills and whispers to him, “Easy there. I know you’re getting antsy, but...”

Amy watches the kid thoughtfully before it clicks, “Wait, Sonic. Shadow said something about being bonded with Omega and Silver.” She points down the hall, “I think he can feel Shadow’s presence.”

Sonic smirks, “Awesome. I had a Shadow detector this whole time and didn’t even know it.” His grin drops when he points out the cameras, “I don’t know if we’ll be able to get by undetected though. I could probably run past them, but they look they have motion sensors.”

“They really upped the security of this place after they took in Eggman,” Amy states.

“Yeah,” Sonic nods, “With good reason.”

Silver gets even more fussy and starts doing grabby hands at the area down the hall. He snuffles and cries. He chokes on a few sobs before wailing loudly. In doing so, the cameras spark with teal electricity and they fall on their hinges limply.

Sonic just looks down at Silver and then back up at Amy as he shrugs, “I guess he just really misses Shads?” Sonic winks at him and holds his fist out and guides the baby’s fist to his and does a little fist bump, “Good work, Silvy.”

Silver seems a bit more content to get the chaos energy out of his system and he giggles happily in response.

They rush down the hall and make it down to the seventh level. Sonic is expecting another hallway, but apparently the entire floor is built to hold the stasis capsule. Sonic makes his way over to it and gasps when he sees the bodies littered across the floor. “Wh-what happened here?” Sonic asks as he looks up at the capsule.

Shadow’s body is inside and he’s motionless.

Sonic takes carefully steps over to it and frowns when he remembers the dream he had. Was that real? Did it actually happen? Did Shadow kill all of these people?

“You don’t... think there’s a reason he’s in here, right?” Sonic asks with concern.

Amy looks around before locking eyes with Sonic, “Shadow would never do this.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right,” Sonic responds nervously.

Before Sonic can question it further, the alarms trigger and the doors lock around them. A large mech drops down in front of them as a voice inside shouts to them, “Get on your knees and put your hands in the air! I will shoot!”

“You and what army?” Sonic responds with a laugh.

More bots and drones appear a moment later and they’re guns are all aimed at them.

“O-oh... right. You guys kinda *are* the army, huh?” Sonic laughs a bit nervously this time.

Amy holds her hammer in a tight grip and glances at Sonic, “There’s a lot. Do you think we should surrender?”

“No way!” Sonic gets into a confident pose, “The more the merrier!”

“Alright,” Amy responds a bit cautiously, “Just don’t bite off more than you can chew.”

They both move in opposite directions. Amy cries out angrily as she holds her hammer over her head and begins to strike the drones. Sonic runs and dodges bullets with ease and attacks using spin dashes and homing shots, keeping his body curled around Silver to protect him.

Everything is going fine until the second wave comes in and they’re getting overwhelmed. Amy falls back, her hammer sliding across the ground as an explosion hits near her. Sonic’s attention is on her for a moment before he curls himself around Silver once more. His body is flung into the air, but he wraps his arms tightly around the child.

Loud clangs are heard and the locked door dents in a few places before being blasted off. Omega bursts through the door and hovers in the air, catching Sonic in his large metallic arms before an impact can occur.

Sonic unfolds his arms to make sure Silver’s okay and breathes a sigh of relief, “Thanks, Omega.”

“I will have my revenge,” Omega states as he opens fire on the mechs, spraying bullets across the hoard of robots, “Death to second rate robots that choose to oppose me. I am E-123 Omega. The ultimate killing machine.”

“Yeah!” Sonic raises his fists in the air, cheering him on, “Light ‘em up!”

A trail of flames surges through the crowd of mechs and Blaze skids to a stop in front of Amy’s prone body, “Stay down, Lady Rose! I shall protect you!” Blaze cries out as fire bursts through her arms with intensity.

“No can do,” Amy states shakily as she gets back onto her feet, “I’ll fight by your side.”

Sonic glances up when he hears a clank on top of Omega. Rouge is standing on the robot’s head and she’s holding her hand out to him, “Come on. I’ll fly us over to the capsule.”

Sonic nods and grabs her hand.

Rouge pats Omega’s head and says, “Clear us a path, big boy.”

“Affirmative,” is all Omega says in response as he begins to blast a path for them to take.

Rouge flies them through the crossfire, dodging bullets and missiles. They land near the capsule and Rouge begins typing at the control panel. Rouge smirks when she gets through and the lid of the pod lifts up, “That’s one piece of technology they haven’t updated yet.”

Sonic looks down at Shadow as the color slowly returns to his face. He glances back at Rouge, “Shouldn’t he be awake by now?”

Rouge looks down into the pod and reaches down to shake Shadow’s shoulder, “Hey, Shadow! Get up! Answer me!”

Sonic just watches in horror as Rouge shakes his limp body, “Why isn’t he moving?”

“I don’t know, blue,” Rouge replies with disbelief. She leans in and feels his heartbeat dulling down to a low murmur.

“Is he...?” Sonic is afraid to ask.

Silver whimpers and holds his hands out to him. He begins to glow as he fusses in the harness.

Sonic places his hands on the child’s shoulders, “Silver, stop it.”

Silver cries and pulls away from him.

“I said stop it, dude!” Sonic states a bit more forceful.

Silver glows brighter and rips his body away from the harness. He gently floats over to Shadow and lands on his chest. The child cries as he buries his face in the white patch of fur.

Rouge pulls her fingers away from his pulse and looks away with tears in her eyes.

“Rouge,” Sonic looks to her expectantly and then back at Shadow.

She places a hand on his shoulder and says in a whisper, “I’m sorry, blue...”

Sonic’s face drops when he hears those words. “No,” he shakes his head and waits for her to speak again so she can tell him otherwise. When he sees her shake her head, Sonic steps toward the pod and places his fingers to his neck, “No... no,no,no...” His heart stops when he doesn’t feel a pulse. “No, this is wrong,” Sonic shakes his head and continues to feel around for a pulse.

“Blue, he’s gone,” Rouge tries to tell him.

“There’s no way,” Sonic says as he grits his teeth. He watches Shadow’s body as his vision turns blurry from tears. He tries to blink them away, but more come and he finds himself sobbing next to where Silver is. “You promised,” Sonic whispers angrily, “You promised you’d never give up!”

Sonic gasps when he feels a pull of energy being forced out of him. He looks up and watches as Silver glows brighter. Silver lets out a wail and it echoes through the room. The energy flies out in a burst and it flows through the room like a wave. Everything around them pauses as if being frozen in time.

Sonic looks around them and sees Rouge standing in place like a statue. He looks down at the child as if he has no idea what is happening.

“I think I understand now,” Blaze’s footsteps make their way over to Sonic, “I know what my

purpose is.”

Sonic looks at her like he doesn’t understand.

“I was chosen by the flames not because I was supposed to aid you,” Blaze explains sadly as she looks down at Shadow, “I was given Iblis’ soul because I was chosen to transport it to its rightful owner.”

Sonic’s eyes widen when he realizes what she’s saying, “Blaze, don’t. You can’t...”

“I must,” Blaze whispers, “There is no other way. Besides, living in this time period and seeing a moment of peace was enough for me.” She lifts her hand to her forehead and pulls the gemstone out. She hands it to Sonic before feeling her knees shake under her own weight before falling to the ground.

Sonic holds the stone in his hand and feels the familiar warmth from it. He tries to pry his eyes away from Blaze’s body and looks back down at Shadow. He swallows back his emotions as he carefully places it into Shadow’s forehead.

The gem slides into his skin and his body warms. The dull heartbeat returns and Silver looks up like he can sense Shadow once more. Sonic hesitantly places his fingers back to Shadow’s pulse, but gasps when he feels Shadow’s hand slide around his. He looks down at Shadow’s face and those intense ruby eyes are staring back at him.

Sonic wraps his arms around his neck and pulls him into a sudden hug, “Shadow!”

“You shouldn’t have come here,” Shadow tells him even though he’s pulling Sonic and Silver closer to him.

“No way,” Sonic retaliates trying to sound confident even though there’s tears in his eyes and he’s forcing a smile, “I told you. Even if GUN locked you up, I’d come rescue you.”

“I turned myself in,” Shadow informs him with a grim look, “I almost killed you... and then, Mephiles...” Shadow pulls himself up into a sitting position, “Mephiles. He was controlling me. Where is he?”

“Blaze!!!” Amy shouts as the last mechs drop to the ground. She rushes over to Blaze’s body and gives Sonic a questioning look, “What happened!?”

“I... She...” Sonic attempts to explain, “She gave up Iblis’ soul to save Shadow.”

Amy gets to her feet and curls her hand into a fist before punching Sonic right in the face.

Sonic falters back a few steps and holds his jaw painfully.

“And you just let her!?” Amy asks with tears in her eyes.

“What was I supposed to do?” Sonic asks as he takes another step backwards.

“Easy there, Pinky,” Rouge tries to reason.

Amy just sends her a glare and it shuts her up. She stomps closer to Sonic and shouts, “You’re the hero, Sonic! You’re supposed to come up with a solution! There has to be a way to save her! There has to be a way!”

Sonic holds his hands up defensively, “It was her choice.”

“You always find a way,” Amy says, her face going from angry to desperate and sad, “You always find a way, Sonic!”

Sonic looks away, unsure what to even say.

Amy falls to her knees and starts pounding her fists into Sonic’s torso, but they have no power to them. They’re just pitiful as she cries.

Sonic just looks down at her with regret in his eyes. How can he tell her that this is probably what the future version of Shadow had planned for Blaze? How can he tell her that this was the only way to fix things? He knows he can’t emotionally do this without Shadow, but he also physically can’t either. He’s seen the future where Shadow isn’t with him and now there’s nothing left. Either way, it was a loss. “I’m sorry, Ames...”

Shadow pulls himself out of the capsule and hands Silver over to Rouge. He makes his way over to Blaze and picks up her body. He stops in front of Amy and informs her, “We will make this right.”

Amy locks eyes with him for a moment searching for the truth behind his words. When she sees it, she just looks away and nods as she wipes the stream of tears running down her cheek. Sonic goes to help her back up, but she refuses and stands up on her own.

Shadow places Blaze into the stasis chamber and seals it closed. He places his hand on the glass and whispers to himself, “Thank you. Your sacrifice will not be in vain.” Shadow glances up at Omega who is punching what is left of the robotic remains into a oily pulp. Shadow sighs and folds his arms across his chest, “Omega, I think you’ve got them.”

Omega’s body stops for a moment as it takes his sensors a moment to realize it’s Shadow’s voice that’s addressing him. His fist stops and he makes his way over to Shadow, disabling his firearms, “Area secure. Awaiting new orders. It’s nice to have you back, agent Shadow.”

“We need to get out of here as soon as we can,” Shadow states.

“I will blow a hole into any armed defenses that comes our way,” Omega responds with his large robotic fists in the air.

“That’s precisely the problem,” Shadow explains with a frown, “If we destroy anymore of this island’s defenses, it could be detrimental to the prison security. We can’t let any of these convicts escape their cells.”

Omega’s arms lower and he looks away, “...Permission to destroy inmates too?”

“No,” Shadow scowl hardens.

“Filing this under: Bullshit,” Omega states, his robotic voice droning at the end simulating his distaste.

Sonic and Rouge both rush to Silver’s ears and shout in unison, “Language!”

Omega’s gears whirl for a moment before stating, “Renaming file folder: Bull Hockey.”

Shadow turns to Sonic with an expectant look, “Well, get us out of here.”

“What the heck do you want me to do, Shads?” Sonic asks with his arms out.

Shadow’s arms fall to his sides, “...You didn’t use Chaos Control to get inside the base?”



Sonic opens his mouth, but closes it. He taps his chin and looks away sheepishly.

Rouge steps in, “He didn’t have a Chaos Emerald with him.”

Shadow’s stare sharpens on Sonic.

“I forgot I could use Chaos Control whenever! Okay!?” Sonic blurts out, “I just figured out I could do that!”

Shadow grits his teeth and doesn’t even want to think about how much damage was done to this place now. “Subtlety isn’t your strong suit,” Shadow says with a bland look.

“No,” Sonic says with a pout, “but apparently being a jerk is yours. I saved your life.”

“*We* saved Shadow’s life,” Omega points out.

Sonic whirls his body around to the robot and gets in his face, “Who’s side are you on!?”

Omega’s eyes shift back and forth from Shadow to Sonic before a few sparks fly out from his head plate, “Error... Error... Error...”

Rouge rushes over to him and pats his arms, “Easy there, Omega. Don’t think too hard.”

“I didn’t ask for that,” Shadow responds with a dark tone, “I turned myself in because I was a danger to my family.”

“A danger!?” Sonic like he’s appalled to even hear those words, “You’re joking, right? This might be news for you, but me and Silver are also reincarnate gods of destruction. Your Iblis. I’m Chaos. And Silver is probably Solaris.”

“Wait, what?!” Rouge asks as she looks down at the child in her arms.

“Welcome to the club...” Amy says with exasperation.

“Updating files—“ Omega starts to say.

“N-no! Stop,” Sonic shouts, waving his arms in front of Omega’s face.

They stop when they hear more soldiers filing into the room.

Shadow grips Sonic’s wrist and place his palm onto Omega, “Everyone, grab hold of Omega!” He turns to Sonic with a glare, “Initiate Chaos Control.”

“Wh-where!?” Sonic questions.

“Anywhere, but here!” Shadow says with a snarl.

There’s a blue flash and the fresh air hits their faces, except they’re freefalling down toward the ocean. Sonic gasps and looks up to see the helicopter above them. He warps a bit higher and luckily Omega grabs them all and hovers over to the aircraft. Omega holds his arms out like a bridge for them to walk upon.

When they all get onto the chopper, Topaz glances back at them, “Not the most conventional rescue mission, but I’ll take it.”

Sonic pushes Shadow a little when he sits down, “Don’t do this ever again.”

Shadow pushes him back, "I was protecting you."

Sonic braces his feet on the side and pushes his back into Shadow so he's pressed against the window, "Don't protect me from you! Protect me from actual enemies!"

Shadow loses his temper and pushes Sonic back into the other side of the seat, "Mephiles was inside me, controlling my body! I didn't have a choice! Now, stop acting like a child!"

"You're *both* acting like children," Rouge states with anger. She sits between the two and places Silver on her thigh as she says, "Now, we have a long ride back and you two are going to tell me everything."

"Shadow can tell you," Sonic says with a huff, "I've done enough and besides, I feel like riding in coach today." The blue hero gets up and jumps out of the chopper and onto Omega, using his shoulder as a lounge chair.

Shadow lets out an irritated sigh.

Rouge gets his attention again and looks at him expectantly, "Well?"

"Look, if you think I withheld information from you purposefully, then you've got it all wrong," Shadow begins to say.

"You've never withheld information from me before period. Not even about you being an experiment or an alien or whatever. Why is this any different?" Rouge asks with a frown.

Shadow looks away and knits his brow together, "Because it isn't just about me this time. I don't care what you or anyone thinks of me or what I am. It's about Silver and keeping him safe. It's about Sonic and his reputation. It's about my family's peace of mind. I can handle the backlash. I don't care about any of that. Sonic isn't like me and Silver... I don't know what he'd want yet."

Rouge looks down at the child in her lap and nods softly, "Alright." She glances back up at Shadow and pleads, "But please, tell me why you decided to turn yourself in out of the blue like that."

"I thought I was losing my mind," Shadow whispers.

"What?" Rouge asks in confusion.

"There was this *thing* inside me. Mephiles. It's this... byproduct of Metal Sonic from the future. Trust me. It's a long story and I will fill you in on the specifics later. I promise. But..." Shadow trails off a bit and rubs his head like he can still feel the weird sensation from it, "It was controlling me. I could feel it."

"Why didn't you tell anyone?" Rouge states with anger, "That's something you could have at least told blue."

"I *tried* to," Shadow retaliates with a heated look, but it melts away into sorrow, "I tried to, Rouge. Something was wrong. I didn't feel like myself."

"It's true," Amy vouches for him suddenly, "Sonic was having me take care of him for a bit. It was kind of bad."

"I could feel it," Shadow murmurs with a snarl, "It was in my head. It wanted Silver and it wanted me to kill Sonic. I didn't want anyone hurt."

“I see,” Rouge responds a bit in awe and a bit more understanding. “So, where is this Mephiles now?”

Shadow shakes his head, “I don’t know? He took Iblis’ soul from me and disappeared. I guess it was feeding off my negative emotions and created a physical form from it.”

“Why does it need that?” Amy asks with a stern look.

“To become complete. To become this creature called Solaris,” Shadow answers with a frown.

“So, what’s going to happen?” Amy asks with a look of horror.

Shadow doesn’t answer. He just holds his hands out like he has nothing.

“We have to stop him!” Amy says with urgency.

“Apparently the only thing that can stop Mephiles is Silver, but...” Shadow glances over at the child who is chewing on his fist mindlessly as he listens to Shadow talk. Shadow gives him a sad smile before turning back to Amy, “I suppose Sonic and I will have to fight it.”

“Well, we need the Chaos Emeralds,” Amy states nervously, “We need to...”

Shadow sits up abruptly and locks eyes with Amy before looking out the window at Sonic, “They’re with Tails, I believe. Six of them at least...” He turns to Rouge and tells her, “Contact Tails and Knuckles immediately. Tell them to retrieve the last emerald from my home and we’ll meet with them as soon as we can.” Shadow stands up and makes his way over to Topaz and explains that they need to head to Mystic Ruins instead of HQ.

## Within Chaos



### Chapter Twenty: Within Chaos

It's a few hours later when Sonic pops out one of his earbuds and squints out at the horizon. He swears he can see the cliff of Tails' workshop coming into view. He turns off his phone and taps Omega on the shoulder and says, "I know I'm bad with directions, but that doesn't look like GUN HQ."

"Negative," Omega responds as his eyes shift over to Sonic, "According to my sensors, we've been going off course for about two and half hours."

"Oh really?" Sonic says with a huff, "Gimme a lift over to the chopper."

Omega does as he says. He holds Sonic in his arms and flies closer, holding his arms out like a bridge for him.

Sonic saunters across it and leans against the door, "Hey! Wanna explain why we're headed to my bro's?"

"Just a precaution, blue," Rouge explains, "You might have a fight on your hands soon."

Sonic's eyes rest on Shadow and he gestures for him to come closer with his finger.

Shadow rolls his eyes and gets up. He yelps when Sonic pulls him out of the chopper and onto Omega's arms. His shoes flare up, but die down when he realizes he's on solid footing. He glares at Sonic.

“You afraid of heights, Shadow?” Sonic says, stifling his laughter.

“Considering I fell from space...” Shadow reminds him, not finishing his sentence.

Sonic winces when he realizes what he’d just done. He helps Shadow over to Omega’s shoulder and he takes a seat on top of Omega’s head, sitting cross-legged.

“So, you’re speaking to me now?” Shadow asks as he folds his arms across his chest.

“I dunno? I’m still mad, but...” Sonic shrugs and leans back on his arms.

“Let me make something clear,” Shadow interrupts him and shifts his sitting position so he’s crossing one leg over the other, “It isn’t a question of if we fight Mephiles, but when. When we do, I need you to be on your guard. He got into my head and he might do the same to you. And that can be very dangerous.”

“Dangerous how?” Sonic asks with a bored look.

“I believe he lost his physical form after Iblis decimated the Earth. He must have retreated to the ARK and was in a dormant state when we traveled there in the future. He manipulated my body and used my negative energy to recreate a physical form,” Shadow attempts to explain, “We cannot let him feed off our negative emotions when we fight him. We have to remain calm or else he’ll get even stronger.”

“I’m all about calm,” Sonic says with a confident smile.

Shadow lowers his brow, “Usually, yes, but lately...”

“Just relax,” Sonic says with a wave of his hand, “We’ll just turn super and beat him. Ya know, like we always do.”

“This is no ordinary opponent, Sonic,” Shadow reminds him with a bite to his words, “This is someone who has successfully destroyed his own timeline and is after time and space itself.”

“Well, do you want me to be calm or do you want to worry about it,” Sonic asks with slight irritation, “‘cause you’re kinda contradicting yourself.”

“I want you to be calm, yes,” Shadow responds with a sigh and reaches out to place his hand on Sonic’s, “but I also want you to be prepared.”

Sonic looks away a bit stubbornly, but he laces their fingers together anyway, “Shadow?”

“Yes,” Shadow says patiently.

Sonic looks out at the horizon and sees the landmass getting bigger. He sighs and shakes his head, “Nevermind.” He sees Shadow looking up at him still and he gives him a smirk, “Wanna tell Topaz to land on the actual landing pad? The last thing I want to happen is the roof to go flying off my bro’s place.”

Shadow smiles back at him and squeezes his hand, “I will go inform her now.” Shadow gets up and hovers back to the chopper.

Sonic watches him go and his smirk drops a little. He has a sour pit in his stomach and he’s not sure why. All he wants to do is land as soon as possible.

Sonic doesn’t wait until they land. When he sees the edge of the cliff get close enough, he teleports

onto it and makes his way inside. He breathes a sigh of relief when he sees Knuckles on the couch and Tails sitting at the counter.

“Catch,” Knuckles snickers as he tosses the green emerald to him.

Sonic catches it midair and lifts it up to him in a silent thanks. He makes his way over to Tails, “Hey, bud.”

“Hey yourself,” Tails responds with his hands on his hips, “Saw you on the news. What did you do this time?”

“Long story,” Sonic says with a laugh, “It’s all good now. Nothing I can’t patch up later. We got bigger fish to fry.”

Tails just offers him a laugh and shakes his head, “Typical.”

They hear the chopper landing in the distance. Just as Sonic expected, he can feel the roof whistling a bit from the wind. Luckily, they’re far enough away so it won’t do as much damage.

The group makes their way into the small home and Rouge immediately flies into Knuckles’ lap. To which Knuckles is hiding his face and blushing. Sonic is trying not to laugh too hard at the guy. He’s tough as nails on the outside, but a shy softy on the inside.

Tails offers everyone a drink and Sonic doesn’t usually help him out, but he doesn’t want to leave his brother’s side for some reason. He’s just kind of worried.

Tails notes this, but doesn’t call him out on it. Instead, he turns to Shadow once everyone is settled, “So, I’m afraid to ask, but what’s going on?”

“Mephiles is alive and in this time period,” Shadow explains with a grim tone.

Tails looks around and doesn’t see anything out of the ordinary, “And he has Iblis now, right? So, shouldn’t something be happening?”

“Yes, but the only assumption I can think of is that he isn’t powerful enough yet,” Shadow states.

Tails turns to Sonic with a frown.

“Hey, don’t look at me. I don’t know what’s goin’ on,” Sonic says with a huff.

“So, I guess we’re just waiting for him to rear his ugly face then, huh?” Tails asks with a shrug.

“I wouldn’t say ugly,” Sonic responds as he leans against the counter and shoots Shadow a look, “The guy looks just like you, right Shads?”

Shadow just rolls his eyes at him and offers Silver over to Amy for the moment. “He does, but... doesn’t,” Shadow explains trying to ignore the eerie feeling bubbling up inside him, “He’s Metal Sonic’s data of us, but... melded together as this abomination. You can tell that some of the data isn’t present because he just looks... incomplete.”

“Freaky,” Tails says with a disturbed look, “Sounds like a ghost story come to life.”

“It’s a living nightmare,” Shadow murmurs softly.

Sonic sees the slightly vulnerability on Shadow’s face and feels a little bit of guilt. He glances down at the emerald in his hand and sees that it’s flashing slightly. He glances up at the others and sees that

they're doing the same.

"Whoa," Tails says when he sees it. He pulls out his device and scans them, "Their energy levels are off the charts!"

Sonic shoots Shadow a cautious look and Shadow returns it. He walks over to Shadow and hands him the Chaos Emerald that's in his hand, "You think he's coming?"

"I'm not sure," Shadow responds.

"Knux. Omega. You're with us," Sonic says as he makes his way over to the door.

"But Sonic..." Tails tries to say.

"No, you're staying right here, lil bro," Sonic responds sternly.

"But the Tornado 2. I rigged it to turn into a mech. It should have the same firepower as Omega and..." Tails explains as quickly as he can.

"Perhaps it's best you sit this one out," Shadow states and exchanges a look with Sonic.

"C'mon," Sonic urges him and makes his way out the door. Shadow, Omega, and Knuckles follow after. He skids to a stop when he makes his way down the hill and sees a figure walking toward them. "Is that...?" Sonic begins to ask.

"Yes," Shadow confirms, readying himself.

Sonic walks forward and relaxes his stance. He projects his voice out toward the figure and says, "Hey, a little late to the party, aren't ya?"

The figure takes its time walking over to them, taking slow eerie steps. It finally stops when he's across from the four. He slowly lifts his head and his green bestial eyes stare at them, "On the contrary. I've been waiting for you for some time now."

"Aw, you shouldn't have," Sonic says with a snicker. He crouches down and spin dashes him, watching his body fall back against the ground. He smirks at the downed hedgehog and finishes, "No, really. You shouldn't have."

Mephiles picks himself up leisurely and stands in his inhuman posture. One that looks more like a marionette hanging by its strings, "And turn down my formal invitation? That would be rude."

"Nobody invited you," Shadow states with a snarl.

Mephiles laughs, his voice projecting like a sound wave around them. "It's funny," Mephiles says with an amused tone, "What is it like to harbor fear? What exactly is that emotion used for? And why do life forms usually cover it up with other emotions?" He lifts his hand up and points at Shadow first, "Like anger and frustration." His finger lands on Sonic next, "or comedy and mockery."

"No one's afraid of you, Mephy," Sonic declares with a smirk, "Now, go back to the toy box you came from."

Mephiles throws his head back and laughs, "Yes, that's one strength of yours that's very effective."

Sonic raises an eyebrow and gives him a bored look, "What? Makin' you laugh?"

"No," Mephiles shakes his head and takes a step forward, "Mentally tearing down your opponents

before you make your move. It's devious and manipulative and I love it."

"Yeah. No. Sorry, buddy. I don't do that," Sonic responds with an impatient look.

"But you do," Mephiles replies with a knowing look, "I'm more you than anyone else. I know how our mind works. How else do you get others to do what you say? You praise the ones who are of use to you and tear down those who are in your way. That's how you've recruited so many others onto your side. You project this illusion of a person you aren't. You make yourself out to be strong, brave, and flawless. A true hero. You give everyone what they want for love and affection in return. Even if you do something wrong everyone will disregard it and defend you and say it's right. You're a sociopath."

Sonic shrinks back a little.

Shadow takes a step forward and whispers to him, "Don't let him get to you."

"Do I do that?" Sonic whispers to him.

"Focus," Shadow states a bit angrier.

"You're just a spoiled child everyone follows," Mephiles continues as he takes carefully steps forward, "Even those you recruit... When they fall out of line you throw a tantrum or criticize and mock them until they step back in line. Underneath your happy and humble exterior, you're a selfish and bitter person. In truth, you have no idea what you're doing as a leader and you make everyone else do your dirty work until you rush in and get praised for the fame."

"That's enough," Shadow shouts and points at him, "Omega, annihilate him!"

"All systems go," Omega states as the compartments on his body open up, "Lock and load." A moment later he's firing everything he has at Mephiles.

The bullets and missiles hit their targets, but it only serves to cause him to step backwards and fall to the ground. The ground is singed and the grass has been completely burnt away. Mephiles lays motionless and it seems to all be over until the figure twitches slightly. He pulls himself up again and cackles menacingly.

Shadow turns to the echidna, "Knuckles, get into position." When he sees the other nod, the two begin to run forward. Shadow holds his hand out to him and Knuckles grabs it. Shadow revs into a tight ball and Knuckles holds him over his head before punching him with all his might, aiming straight for Mephiles.

Shadow unfolds his body and uses his momentum to kick his leg out and dig the heel of his foot into Mephiles' head. The action forces Mephiles to hit the ground face first into a giant crater in the ground. Shadow feels himself shaking in anger, but stays put to make sure he's down for good.

Mephiles doesn't move from where he's laying. His shoulders just bob as he laughs, "Oh, Shadow. Poor Shadow. You have it the worst."

"Silence," Shadow shouts and rushes down to grab Mephiles by the back of the head. He tosses his body up and sends a dozen devastating kicks at him before his body falls down against the ground again like a dead fly.

Mephiles just continues to laugh, "He makes you feel so good, doesn't he?"

"I said, silence," Shadow grits out lifts Mephiles' face up with the toe of his shoe before kicking him



back.

Mephiles falls onto his back and continues to laugh harder, “You’re his white knight. He gives you a purpose in your meaningless life. You know you’re a monster and there’s no making up for the things you’ve done, but if someone with his standing sees you as something even remotely worth redeeming you can try to find a speck of good within yourself.”

Shadow lifts his foot up and stomps on his face, but no matter how hard he hits him Mephiles won’t stop. He isn’t speaking with a mouth. It’s just projected thoughts echoing out to him.

“You claim to be his equal, but you know better. You fight for him, but no matter what you do you can’t erase the past. How can you? You desperately seek control, but you fail to realize one thing, Shadow,” Mephiles goes on with amusement, “Yes, you are the weapon. You aren’t the trigger. Did you blame the weapon for Maria’s death or the being behind it? The one who’s hand was on the trigger. You didn’t vow your revenge of guns, but *the humans!* Who’s soul controls you? There’s a reason he’s called Chaos and you aren’t!”

Shadow grips Mephiles’ shoulders and throws his body off the cliff. He waits until he hears the splash of water and he grips his chest, trying to catch his breath. “We need the emeralds,” Shadow states and turns to Omega, “Retrieve them now.”

Omega turns to do just that.

Knuckles walks over to him and asks with concern, “You alright?”

Shadow nods and regains his composure, “Yes, but I need you to get the Master Emerald just in case.”

Knuckles nods, “Okay.” He catches up with Omega and disappears into the workshop.

“Sonic,” Shadow says as he turns to him. He’s about to give an order, but stops when he sees Sonic’s face.

Sonic looks stunned as tears drip down his face.

Shadow’s face softens as he makes his way over to the blue hero. He wipes the tears away from his cheeks and cups his face. He stares into his eyes and says, “Remember what I said. Do not let him get into your head.”

“But is he wrong?” Sonic asks.

“Everything he’s saying is a lie,” Shadow explains, “Everything he’s claiming you’re doing, he is. So, don’t...”

“But I’m part of him, right?” Sonic questions with distress.

“You don’t have ill intentions,” Shadow points out and presses his forehead against Sonic’s, “You’re fighting for the greater good. You’re a good person.”

Sonic takes in a deep breath and nods before locking eyes with him, “Yeah, okay... Sorry.”

“Omega’s getting the emeralds and we’re going to end all of this, alright?” Shadow says, “Just stay focused.”

Sonic nods once more and gets into a solid stance.

Omega and Knuckles arrive shortly after with the items that were requested to retrieve. The robot places the emeralds down in front of the two and Shadow places the one in his hand down with the others.

Shadow holds Sonic's hand as the emeralds begin to float around them. He can feel the power surging inside of him. He can see the black coloration of his body glowing to a soft gold and Sonic's fading from blue to yellow. Just as the transformation is complete, Sonic is tackling Shadow to the ground. He looks up and sees the white beam of light just miss their bodies and cut across the large rock structure in the distance. Shadow turns to the direction it was fired and sees Mephiles hovering in the air with his arm outstretched.

Mephiles' hand is glowing white as another beam charges up in his palm, "Here I thought Shadow's negative energy was strong. Sonic, yours is much stronger. I will be at my full strength in no time."

Sonic launches off the ground like a shooting star and flies right at him. He's a beam of light in the sky trying to hit Mephiles, but Mephiles keeping dodging and disappearing and reappearing.

Shadow flies off after him, looking for an opening. When he sees it, he goes in and attacks. Each shot he gets in though just sends Mephiles flying into the water and then back up. He's never faced a foe that was so resistant to any attack. The harder he hits him it just seems like the harder he falls, but with no actual damage.

Mephiles unleashes his beam of light once more and Shadow dodges it. He turns around and realizes that it wasn't aimed at him, but at Sonic. It nicks Sonic's shoulder and the hero goes flying backwards.

Shadow curses and flies after him, focusing all of his energy toward his shoes to boost to him forward faster. Shadow snags Sonic's wrist and pulls him in and the two are hurled into the small pond with a splash. The aura around them prevents them from getting wet, but Shadow can see the coloration of Sonic's body diminishing and falling away from him like stardust. Shadow wraps one arm under his legs and the other behind his back and floats out of the water.

The moment Sonic's eyes flutter open, he hisses and grabs his arm, "Ugh! It hurts, dude!"

Shadow places him on the ground with his back against the cliff's wall and he looks it over with concern, "What does it feel like?"

"Like... like it's burning," Sonic winces and grips his fingers against it harder, "But... like, in a cold way!"

Shadow brushes Sonic's hand away and lets the hero hold onto his hand instead. He places his fingers against the spot and it does feel cold to the touch. He places his palm against it, hoping that the energy can seep into it and warm the wound.

Sonic grabs Shadow's hand in a tight grip and cries out in pain, but it melts away into a relieved noise.

Shadow's eyes dart up when he hears the spray of bullets and the grunts of the echidna. They must be holding off Mephiles for them. He looks back down at Sonic and asks, "Do you think you can still fight?"

Sonic just smirks at him, "There's no way I'm letting you take all the glory."

Shadow just nods back to him and pulls off his inhibitor. His hand glows bright yellow and he presses his palm together with Sonic's. He watches as the gold coloration returns to Sonic's body

and only pulls it away when he's sure Sonic's energy is restored.

"How much of a dent do you think we've put into that guy so far?" Sonic asks as he watches Shadow reclip his inhibitor ring.

"I'm not going to lie," Shadow states with a grim look, "but I don't think we've done any damage at all."

Sonic rests his head against the wall and groans, "Are you kidding me?"

"I wish I were," Shadow states regretfully as he grabs Sonic's wrist and they fly back up to the cliff's edge.

They can see that Omega and Knuckles are definitely attacking Mephiles, but are being used as mere play things.

Shadow turns to Sonic and gives him a stern look, "Do you remember that move we performed on the ARK?"

"Oh, uh... that thing we did on accident?" Sonic asks and sees Shadow nod, "Yeah, I remember, but it wrecked your brain."

Shadow holds Sonic's hand in a firm grip and gives him a determined look, "We have to do something."

"Okay, okay," Sonic responds and takes a breath. He grips Shadow's hand tighter and holds his other hand outward with Shadow.

"Chaos..." They cry out together.

"Spear!"

"Control!"

Mephiles' body stops in midair and his eyes stiffly look over at the two super hedgehogs before him, "What!?"

Shadow curls his fingers into a fist and lets the energy build up inside his body, "Chaos..."

Sonic glances over at Shadow nervously before curling his hand into a fist as well and cries out with him, "Blast!"

Mephiles' eyes widen as his body is blown backwards and hits the rocky wall behind him. His body singes and visible smoke begins to repel from his body as he slides down. He stands back up and begins to walk forward, but each step he takes is slow and sluggish as pieces of his legs break off into sticky tar.

Sonic barely notices Mephiles and is instead worried about Shadow, "How do you feel?"

"I feel..." Shadow murmurs in confusion before locking eyes with Sonic in surprise, "Fine. I feel fine."

"Sweet," Sonic says happily before turning to face their foe, "I'm gunna try to synchronize with your movements the best I can. Just don't let go of my hand."

Shadow's hand tightens on Sonic's and he nods to him, "I won't."

Sonic smirks at him and sends him a thumbs up, "C'mon. We're gunna do something really cool." Sonic begins flying high in the sky and he can feel Shadow's shoes boosting him forward to keep up. Once he sees they're high enough, Sonic stops and winks at Shadow, "Get that Chaos Spear ready."

Shadow lifts his hand and the electricity crackles in his hand.

Sonic pulls Shadow back down and they fly down at an incredible rate. He doesn't break the sound barrier though. Not yet. He's waiting for the right moment. As the ground gets closer and closer to view, Shadow glances over at Sonic with a questioning look and Sonic remains silent. Just as they're about to hit he says, "Now!"

Shadow holds his hand out just as Sonic does. The electricity shoots down from his palm and the force from the sonic boom forces it outward like a wave of energy.

The electricity surges up Mephiles' limbs and the backlash disintegrates his body into a black puddle on the ground.

"Yeah!" Sonic shouts out in victory and pulls Shadow into a hug, "How do you like them apples!?"

Shadow's eyes widen and stabilizes Sonic's body a bit. They spin around a few times and Shadow guides them back toward the ground, their feet still hovering from their super state. Shadow watches the black puddle for any activity, but it really does seem like it's down for the count. Shadow glances down at his palm a bit in awe. The power and force of it. It was incredible and kind of exhilarating.

Sonic makes his way over to Omega and Knuckles, "Thanks for the backup. I appreciate it."

Omega holds his arms up and states, "No foe is too much for the ultimate killing machine to handle."

Knuckles just gives Sonic a smug look, "What can I say? You need me. It's not like you can fight your own battles."

"Now, that's just mean, Knuckles," Sonic says back with mock sadness as he nudges his shoulder.

Shadow just watches Sonic's interactions. He feels his smile growing on his face, but it drops when he hears a ripple of water. He looks behind him and feels his heart stop when he sees the beam of light charging before him. He calls out to the three, "Watch out!"

Sonic gasps and rushes at Knuckles, pushing him out of the way. Omega's body gets hit. It crystallizes over and the temperature is so cold it causes his systems to burst and explode.

Shadow launches off the ground the moment he sees the small bird fly out of the body and he wraps his arms around it. He holds the bird close to his chest, using his own body as a shield from the blast, and glares over at the puddle that is slowly morphing back into Mephiles' body.

"Celebrating a little early now, aren't we?" Mephiles snickers in a mocking tone.

"Don't worry, Shads," Sonic calls over to the dark hero, "My bro will get Omega back up and running. Right after we get rid of this melted piece of asphalt."

Mephiles' hand reforms and it's sharper and more solid than before. It's littered with crystallized ice and rocks. "Your fear is delicious, Shadow," Mephiles comments, "Nothing goes together quite as nicely as cold and darkness. Like your heart."

"Yeah? Well, you're gunna be cold and dark when I'm done with you," Sonic retorts with anger,

“Out cold and black and blue!”

Shadow sees Sonic rush at him and he holds his arm out, “Wait!”

His warning falls on deaf ears though. Sonic smashes through his body and Mephiles reforms much like he had before. Sonic keeps attacking though. Punching and kicking through the disgusting tar. The muddy mess gets on him though and its elastic nature begins to wrap around his body. Sonic struggles to get free and gasps when he sees Mephiles’ form over him.

Mephiles’ solid arm comes down and clasps onto Sonic’s neck like a vice, “Yes, struggle all you want. It just makes this all the more fun.”

“Sonic!!!”

Mephiles’ eyes widen when he feels a spray of bullets hit his back. “I thought I got rid of that damn...” Mephiles looks up and his voice comes out more amused, “...robot.”

Sonic pulls his arms free and wraps his hands around Mephiles’ arm. It singes and burns, disgusting black smoke coming from it before Sonic pries it away from his throat. Sonic wheezes out and still feeling the burning cold in his throat. He presses his fingers up against the frozen spot and it melts away much like last time when Shadow did it. Sonic catches his breath and looks up to where the attack came from and he freezes in place.

Tails is in his mech on the roof of the workshop. He sends more bullets and missiles at Mephiles.

“No! Stop, Tails!” Sonic shouts over to him. He turns over to Shadow and cries out, “Dude, go get —“

Shadow is mid-teleport and it happens so fast that Sonic barely registers what’s happened. It doesn’t seem real.

Mephiles’ hand is already outstretched and the beam of light is traveling at high speeds. The beam penetrates the mech suit and goes through Tails’ chest.

Shadow gets there just in time to grab Tails from the mech before it explodes, but the damage was already done.

Sonic feels the anger burning in his chest and his eyes prick with tears. He grabs Mephiles’ throat and cries out as the chaos energy explodes outward like a powerful wave. Mephiles’ body falls away from him and he desperately gets up and warps over to Tails’ side. Sonic is hyperventilating as he sees the stream of blood leaking from Tails’ mouth.

Sonic turns to Shadow desperately, “Do something!”

“I’m trying,” Shadow tells him with a calculative look as his palms are already pressed against the injury on his chest, “I’m... I’m trying to cauterize the wound, but...”

Sonic grabs Tails’ hand and looks down at him, “Hang in there, buddy. We’re gunna fix you up.”

Tails lifts his hand up and feels around trying to place it on Sonic’s cheek, “S-Sonic? I’m... I’m scared.” Tears begin to fall from the corners of his eyes and stream down the sides of his face.

“Don’t be,” Sonic responds, forcing down the sobs that are threatening his voice, “I’m right here. You’re gunna be okay.” Sonic turns back to Shadow and gives him an anxious look, “Shads?”

“The wound is closed and I’m trying to pinpoint the tissue damage,” Shadow tells him quickly as he presses his fingers against the fox’s skin.

“Try harder,” Sonic urges him.

“*I am*,” Shadow replies with a snarl, his fingers shaking a bit as he feels a tear threatening to fall, “There’s internal bleeding and I can’t... I can’t find the source.”

Sonic looks away and curses, his chest heaving. He feels sick. Why was this happening? Why didn’t Tails just listen to him?

Sonic’s attention is ripped away for a moment when he hears gun shots. Amy, Rouge, and Topaz have joined Knuckles in keeping Mephiles back.

“Sonic...”

Sonic looks back down at Tails and swallows back his emotions, “Yeah, bud?”

“You were the best brother in the world,” Tails says with a sad smile, “I wanted to be just like you. You’re my hero.”

Sonic bows his head and starts crying, “Stop it, dude. Don’t say stuff like that...”

“It’s true,” Tails continues as he weakly guides Sonic’s face back to his eyelevel, “Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. You’re selfless and have a heart of gold. I love you. You were the closest thing to a family I’ve ever had. You didn’t have to stop and help a weak kid like me... but you did... and...”

“Tails!?” Sonic shouts frantically and shakes him, “Stay with me, buddy!”

Tails’ eyes close and his body relaxes.

“Tails!?” Sonic shouts out once more. He turns to Shadow and gives him a terrified look.

Shadow’s palms are still on Tails’ body as he continues to try find the damaged tissue. His arms shake and he bows his head. “Damnit...” Shadow whispers angrily.

“Shadow?” Sonic asks, waiting and hoping for some kind of miracle.

“Damnit all,” Shadow just says as his fingers curl into fists.

“Shadow!?” Sonic shouts as he grabs the dark hero’s shoulders. When Shadow’s lifts his head to meet his, he knows. He just knows. Shadow doesn’t even have to say anything. His expression alone says it all. His fingers slowly slide away from his shoulders and he just looks down in disbelief, “No...”

Shadow looks away unable to bare it.

“I’ve been so caught up with myself lately,” Sonic whispers quietly, “I’ve been avoiding him. If I would have known... this...” Sonic brushes Tails’ bangs away from his face and gives him a sad smile before it contorts into one of pure agony. He collapses onto Tails’ chest and sobs, “What am I gunna do without him?”

Shadow keeps his eyes averted as he places a hand onto Sonic’s back, “I’m sorry...”

“My baby brother is gone,” Sonic whispers pitifully.

Shadow feels the pang in his chest and it hasn't hurt this bad for a long while now. He wishes there was more he could have done. He wishes he could have prepared for this. All of it hurts. Tails gone. Sonic's anguish. It all hits so hard.

"We... We could use the Time Stones and..." Shadow tries to reason out loud.

"Time is nonlinear," Sonic whispers with anger. His head snaps up and he shouts at Shadow, "Tails...! My Tails is gone! There no bringing him back!"

Shadow swallows and hates that Sonic is right.

Sonic stares down with a look of awe before he whispers, "...but if I go back... and I kill the copy of myself..."

"Sonic," Shadow grits out with a heated warning.

"But it's only fair, right?" Sonic asks quickly, "That version of me made the mistake. I'm the one fixing it. If I fix it, I should be able to be the one who..."

Shadow grips his arms and looks into his eyes, "You aren't thinking properly."

"I can fix this," Sonic retorts a bit louder.

"You cannot go back in time without me," Shadow states, "Therefore, I forbid it."

Sonic glances up at Shadow's forehead and then back into his eyes, "But if I take the soul of Iblis and bring it back to Blaze, she'd do it. Then, I could go back... and you'd still be there... Tails would still be alive..."

Shadow's chest heaves as he growls out, "You'd *kill* me!?"

Sonic looks up at Shadow with a pained expression as tears drip down his face.

Even now, when Shadow knows he's right he can't help but feel in the wrong. His face softens and he lowers his head to Sonic, "Fine, go ahead."

Sonic looks up at him like he isn't sure, but lifts his hand anyway.

"Just know one thing, Sonic," Shadow informs him, "You cannot come back here. The others will know of your decision. And... in the past, after you kill your so called 'copy,' do you really think you will soundlessly fall into that Sonic's place. You will never truly be 'Sonic' ever again."

Sonic's hand shies away.

Shadow lifts his head and locks eyes with him, "Your only choice will be to rewrite the timeline so you fall into place again... and at that point, are you truly any better than Metal? Do you want to live as a hero or die a villain?"

Sonic lowers his head and weeps into his hands, "I just want my little brother back!"

"I know..." Shadow murmurs as he pulls Sonic into his chest. He knows all too well.

"Sonic! We need your help! We need to..." Amy's voice comes from inside the building before she reaches the roof. She stops and gasps when she sees what's happened.

Shadow glances out at the battle happening below. The others are having a hard time and Mephiles'

body is almost all crystallized now. "I'll go," Shadow says as he stands up, "Stay here with Sonic."

Amy nods to him, "Okay."

"No," Sonic says as he gets to his feet, "Mephiles is mine."

"You're in no condition to..." Shadow begins to say, but his voice trails off.

It's Sonic's eyes. They aren't singed with red like they usually are in his super form. They're green, but not in their normal way. They look slitted and bestial like Mephiles'. He holds his hand out to Shadow and says, "Give me your power."

Shadow is about to refuse, but his throat closes up. His eyes flash green and then he obeys without his mind telling him to. He places his hand into Sonic's and the energy that was sustaining his super form is sucked out of his body. When Sonic's hand lets go, Shadow falls back onto the ground and his body turns its usual black.

Sonic floats down over to Mephiles as the golden coloration falls away from his body and is replaced with a dark blue. As he makes his way over, the aura that touches the grass under him shrivels up and dies.

"Why did you do that!?" Amy asks as he pulls Shadow back up.

Shadow winces and tries to blink his eyes closed. As he does, his irises fade back to red and he gives Amy a confused look, "What did I do?"

"You gave Sonic the rest of your energy!" Amy shouts with anger.

Shadow glances down at his arms and then his body. She was right. This was bad.

"Mephiles!" Sonic shouts out, "It's just you and me! I will erase you from this timeline!"

Mephiles throws his head back and laughs harder and louder than he has before, "That is your funniest joke yet!"

"It isn't a joke," Sonic snarls back.

"Oh?" Mephiles asks as he takes a step forward, "Then, you're making this far too easy for me." Mephiles floats up and he's like a phantom behind smoke.

Sonic rushes in to destroy one copy and another appears. He follows each one out until he's lured closer and closer to the ocean. Each time he defeats one and another pops up, he can feel the anger rising in his chest. He wants to kill this guy. More than anyone he's ever encountered. More than Eggman. More than Metal. They may have wanted him dead for their own reasons, but Mephiles killed his brother and has the audacity to laugh in his face!

Shadow jumps off the roof and skids over to Knuckles, "You have to stop this! Use the Master Emerald!"

Knuckles seems confused as he looks Shadow over, "Whoa. Why do you want me to stop Sonic?"

"Because," Shadow states with a fretful look, "Mephiles is feeding off Sonic's negative energy. He's getting stronger by the minute."

Knuckles looks at the Master Emerald and then up at the battle in the sky. He gives Shadow an unsure look, but ultimately agrees, "Okay, but he's gunna fall into the ocean and..."



Shadow nods and gets into a running stance as he switches his shoes over to air thrusters, "I will catch him. You have my word." Shadow doesn't wait for Knuckles to reply. He's jumping off the hillside and into the water. His body submerges into the ocean before his shoes hum to life. He boosts forward until his body rises up and he's skating across the surface. He makes his way over to Sonic, riding on the waves. He cranes his head up and does his best to get underneath the blue hero, but Sonic is moving at incredible speeds. Shadow would normally be able to catch up, but the water is slowing him down a bit. He figures as long as he's kind of close, he can still rescue him if he does descend into the water.

He waits for something to happen though. Sonic doesn't seem to be losing any power and Shadow keeps glancing back at the cliff side. He's purposefully ignoring the fact he's never been this far out into the ocean with just his air shoes, but that's only a secondary fear. His main one is Sonic's safety.

He wishes he had a communicator or something because he wants to know what's taking so long.

Shadow's head snaps back up when he hears Sonic let out an angry wail, "C'mon! Fight me, you coward!"

There's an echo of laughter as Mephiles' copies surround Sonic's body. They float and dance around the hero until one smashes down into him, "Gladly!"

Shadow's eyes widen when he sees Sonic's body descending downward like he's out cold. His thrusters burst to life as water droplets spray behind him. He races as fast as his legs can carry him over to Sonic, but the blue hero's body meets the surface with a big splash. Shadow jumps and hovers over the waves that roll out from it and he submerges himself under the water. He glances around frantically and travels deeper. He doesn't see him anywhere. Shadow resurfaces and looks around, hoping he's somehow floating. "Sonic!" Shadow cries out, his eyes darting about in search of him.

A wave rolls in and he's too distracted to notice it pull him under. His body flips a few times in the undertow and he reaches the surface again to get a breath of air. The water is getting a lot choppy and Shadow looks up at the sky and how it's suddenly cloudy.

"Shadow!" Knuckles calls out to him.

Shadow spins himself around, praying the echidna has Sonic. His face drops when he sees that he's alone and riding the wind currents.

"The Master Emerald isn't working!" Knuckles calls out again.

Shadow opens his mouth to respond, but gets knocked under the water again. He tries to will his shoes to work, but with the whirling water currents it's hard to get his bearings. He feels two arms wrap under his and pull him out of the water. He coughs up the water he'd just swallowed and tries to steady his breathing.

"You okay, hon?" Rouge asks with a concerned look.

"I'm alive if that's what you're asking," Shadow responds grimly.

"That's good enough for me," Rouge responds with a forced smile.

"Sonic is..." Shadow starts to say, but looks down and notices the water rising to his ankles. He glances back at the cliff side and... it isn't a cliff side anymore. The water has reached almost all the way to the top. Most of the area is flooded except the landmass Tails' workshop is standing on.

“Hold that thought,” Rouge states as she flaps her wings harder to fly them up higher in the sky. She pulls her glove back with her teeth and talks into the communicator on her wrist, “Rouge to Topaz. I have Shadow. Bring the chopper up.”

The whirling of the helicopter blades are heard in the distance and it lifts off the ground right before a wave rises and cover the landmass.

“Don’t worry. We’re going to get you to safety,” Rouge tells him.

“Safety?” Shadow questions as he tries to slip out of her grip, “I need to find Sonic.”

Rouge feels him slip and she grabs his arm with her other hand, “I’m sure he’ll be fine. He’s in his super form. You aren’t.”

“Then, bring me to the emeralds,” Shadow commands her.

“Fine, just don’t go back in that water,” Rouge warns him as she guides them up toward the chopper. Knuckles meets her halfway and takes Shadow’s other arm as they land together inside.

Amy is looking out at the water as the waves crash into the tiny workshop and up the steep rocky structures. “This is bad,” she says in a fretful tone as she holds Silver closer, more so for her own emotional support, “At this rate Mystic Ruins will be completely submerged. I don’t even want to fathom what Station Square looks like.”

“Don’t worry,” Rouge states in a reassuring manner, “GUN is evacuating the city as we speak.”

“You tapped into the radio?” Topaz asks suddenly.

Rouge gives her a smug look, “Maybe.”

“I don’t understand,” Knuckles says nervously as he looks out at the rising waters, “How is this happening? The Master Emerald is still intact. The last time this happened...”

“When was the last time this happened?” Shadow asks a bit forcefully.

Before Knuckles can open his mouth to respond there’s a loud roar that echoes through the air. Shadow freezes because the last time he’s heard a cry similar to that was when he was face-to-face with the Biolizard. Except this sounded different. This was a sheer powerful sound wave that shook the soul.

Shadow slowly turns around and watches as the water monster rises up from the depths of the ocean. It has thick blue armor around its head and down its back. Its eyes are green and lizard-like and its teeth are sharp and pointed.

Knuckles’ eyes widen and he whispers in awe, “It’s Chaos.”

Shadow places his hand on the side of the chopper door to brace himself by what he’s seeing. It’s terrifying yet hypnotizing. It’s an incredible beast.

“No,” Shadow murmurs back to the echidna, “That’s Sonic.”

# Open Your Heart

## Chapter Notes

Open your HeEeAaAaRrTtT!

Bew-dundundun... Weeeuuueee! dundun

YeeEaaAaah...!

LOL



## Chapter Twenty-One: Open Your Heart

“What do we do!?” Amy cries out in terror.

Shadow looks back at the pink hedgehog and how she’s huddled over Silver. Silver is crying, his face wet with tears and cheeks flushed red. The bird (Omega’s power source) is nestled on her shoulder and Tails... His body is in the back with a blanket draped over him.

Shadow swallows and looks away, trying to sort out the possibilities in his head. He doesn’t know what to do. He doesn’t know how to stop this. He isn’t as much of a hero as Sonic makes him out to be. He wishes he had Sonic here right now. To tell him everything was going to be alright and that they’d figure out a way to fix this. Together.

They weren't together though and he felt lost. Mephiles was going to keep taunting Sonic and feed off his negative energy and he's going to get strong enough to fuse with Iblis and that would be it.

Metal... No, Sonic's other self knew Sonic and had him down to a tee. How could they even attempt to defeat a foe who was an exact copy of him?

Shadow turns to Knuckles and asks, "You were there when it happened the first time. How did Sonic stop Chaos back then?"

"I... I don't know?" Knuckles says frantically, "He... He just turned super and went at him."

"Where are the emeralds?" Shadow questions as he looks around.

"They're here," Knuckles answers, stepping to the side and motioning to the dull gemstones piled onto one of the seats, "but there's no energy left. Positive or negative. It's gone."

Shadow gives the emeralds a concerned look before asking, "And... the Master Emerald...?"

Knuckles shakes his head, "No, I... I don't think it can control Chaos."

Shadow glances back out at the monster and frowns, "Because he's the controller." Shadow's eyes fall down to the water under them and gives it a concentrated look.

"Oh, no you don't," Rouge says as she pulls Shadow back by the shoulder.

"I have to try," Shadow whispers to her.

"But what if you die?" Rouge asks, her eyes glistening with tears, "I can't lose you again, Shadow."

"If I don't go, it's over," Shadow responds softly, "Everything will be gone. Everything will cease to exist."

"Then, I'm coming with you," Rouge states with finality.

Shadow nods back to her, "I wouldn't want it any other way."

"I'm coming too," Knuckles says, taking a step forward alongside them.

"I'll need all the help I can get," Shadow affirms.

He tries to stay strong, but there's still a part of him that's screaming that this is the end. This is it. He can't do this without Sonic. This position was never meant for him.

"Shadow."

Shadow turns to Amy when he hears his name. She's holding Silver up to him and giving him a sad smile.

Shadow looks down at the small child. His big golden eyes staring back at him like beams of sunshine. He gives Silver a determined look. No, he had to do this. He promised a better future for this child. He would not let him down.

"Amy," Shadow says with an unyielding stare, "If something were to happen to Sonic and I... Please, take care of Silver. Give him the future he deserves."

"But..." Amy tries to say.

“And if you can recover Iblis’ soul from my body,” Shadow continues, not giving her the chance to finish, “Return it to Blaze.” Shadow turns and jumps out of the chopper.

Amy goes to reach for him, but he’s already gone.

“Sorry, hon,” Rouge responds with a slight smirk, “Shadow’s not much when it comes to words in these types of situations. Don’t take it too hard.” She jumps out after him and her wings shoot out, catching the air current.

Knuckles hops out last, trailing behind Rouge.

Shadow starts moving the moment his shoes hit the water so he can stay on the surface. He remains a considerable distance away to get a gauge on what he’s up against. He wishes Sonic told him specifics or something other than he fought this thing and that it wasn’t a big deal. Because this feels like the opposite.

Mephiles is hovering over the large beast and laughing. His copies taunt it and the water reptilian opens its mouth and a beam of white light shoots out from its throat. Mephiles merely holds his hand out and shoots the same beam and the two collide. Ice shards rain down over them and Knuckles and Rouge fall back a little.

Shadow glares at the chunks of ice and jumps up. He lands sideways on one and jumps from one piece to the next until he makes his way up toward the head of the beast. His eyes widen when he gets a better view of it.

It has translucent spikes jutting out of its skull and down its back. The one on the very top looks significantly different than the others. Its larger and Sonic’s body is encased inside. Except he isn’t moving. He’s in a fetal position as neon green vein-like structures are connected to him and his eyes are glowing bright green. So much so he can’t make out where his sclera starts and his iris ends.

It sends a shiver down Shadow’s spine. He’s used to seeing and knowing about himself being an experiment and a life form unbeknownst to this world, but Sonic felt like he belonged here. This looks really weird and alien, and it’s dawning on him that Sonic isn’t that different from him.

Shadow angles himself toward the creature’s head, in hopes to land on it. The moment he gets in close though, the beast jerks up and opens its mouth wide. Shadow gasps and falls back as the beam shoots out at him. He narrowly dodges it, but his shoes have a thick layer of frost on them and they’re weighing him down. The momentum spins him around as he descends toward the ocean. He tries to smack his shoes together to chip the ice off of them so he can get them working again. He winces when he sees the surface spinning into his view and braces for impact.

His body stops in motion as he feels a strong arm grab one of his legs and he’s floating away from the monster. He looks up and sees Knuckles looking down at him.

“Sup? Need a lift?” Knuckles asks with a grin.

Shadow just glares at him, but hangs his head back in relief regardless and responds, “Thank you.”

Knuckles pulls him upright again, holding onto one of his arms instead.

Shadow clanks his shoes together a few more good times before blasting the ice away with his flame thrusters. He uses that to help give them lift into the air. “I saw Sonic,” Shadow informs him, “He’s at the very top though and I don’t know how to reach him. It’s head is heavily armored.”

“Oh,” Knuckles says like he’s having an epiphany, “I just remembered. Sonic boosted through the

bottom all the way to the top.”

“I asked you how he stopped Chaos and you stated you didn’t know,” Shadow retaliates angrily.

“Yeah, well...” Knuckles says back with a frown, “I also said I just remembered.”

Shadow looks away and sighs, trying to calm himself. Fighting over this wasn’t going to help any. He looks over the monster’s body once more and sees it. The bottom front is exposed and he’s trying to shake off the similarity of Sonic’s own exposed front. He nods to himself, “Alright. I think I know what to do now.”

The wind whips around suddenly and the two stiffen when they see two tornadoes headed their way. Knuckles looks to his left and tosses Shadow in the air before the wind current throws him up into the air. Shadow tries to balance himself upright as he weaves between the two twisters. He looks up and sees Rouge’s body soaring down to him like a dart. Shadow holds his hand out and she grabs him.

“Kick me toward the bottom of the beast!” Shadow shouts out to her.

“What!?” Rouge asks in horror before seeing a large liquid arm coming toward her. She doesn’t argue though. She waits for Shadow to rev into a ball before aiming him at the belly of the beast. She immediately flies out of the way of the giant arm.

Shadow dashes forward and holds his breath before being submerged completely in the liquid monster. His shoes blast to life and he uses all the energy he can muster to keep him going. He only manages to scale halfway up the large body before he’s falling backwards. He angles his shoes outward and shoots himself out of the body, gasping for air.

His body falls once more before he holds his arm up. He can see Knuckles’ shadow over him and he gets a secure grip on his arm.

“Hey, that was pretty good,” Knuckles says with an impressed look.

“But it’s not enough,” Shadow tells him with distaste.

“Considering you aren’t in your super form, I’d call it a win,” Knuckles points out. He gasps when he sees an arm slapping down toward them. He tosses Shadow in the air, dodges it, and grabs him by the leg again.

“It isn’t a win until I get to him,” Shadow counters, continuing their conversation once he feels himself being caught again. He folds his arms across his chest and looks over at the monster while he’s upside down.

“Maybe you just need a little more umph,” Knuckles suggests.

Shadow taps his finger to his chin and looks up at the echidna’s fists. He remembers how hard of a hit it was when he was tossed by him during the first stages of their fight with Mephiles. He wonders if that would be just enough force. He calls out to Knuckles, “I need to you hit me as hard as you can.”

“I’m sorry,” Knuckles responds, “I didn’t quite catch that.”

Shadow curls his lips and shouts a bit louder, “I need you to hit me as hard as you can!”

Knuckles closes his eyes and relishes in the words being spoken to him, “That’s what I thought you

said.” Knuckles tosses Shadow in the air without much warning, but sees him rev into a tight ball. He cracks his knuckles one-by-one until Shadow’s form descends down in front of him before reeling back and throwing a punch with everything he’s got.

Shadow feels his body soar through the air. He keeps his body tight so he can gain momentum and once he climbs up the creature’s body to its head, he uncurls and his thrusters take over. He looks up and sees Sonic’s body above him. He lifts his arm up to go reach for him, but notices that the water gets colder and colder the closer he gets to him. His body isn’t much effected by the cold from the inside, but he can feel the frost gathering around his joints and immobilizing him. The frigid water also causes his lungs to cease and he releases all of the air that he was holding. Shadow glares out at the monster’s throat and covers his nose and mouth with his hand to try and physically stop his body from releasing more air before angling himself toward his only real exit.

He blasts out of the monster’s mouth and gasps in air the moment he’s no longer submerged. He feels someone grab his leg and he doesn’t really care if its Knuckles or Rouge at this point. He’s just thankful.

Although when said helper begins to speak, his eyes shoot open.

“Isn’t it dawning on you yet, Shadow? There is no way you can win,” Mephiles replies as he looks down at Shadow. Mephiles is almost fully encased in ice and stone. He looks like an intricate statue and it would be appealing if it weren’t for his eyes. Shadow thought before they were terrifying, but the irises are glowing green and the sclera are completely red.

Shadow kicks his foot up and blasts his fire thrusters at him, causing the other to drop him. Shadow sails down toward the water again. His shoes don’t ignite again until he’s about to hit the water to break his fall and he goes under.

He feels the water around him and he closes his eyes. He can’t do this. He has no access to his super form and he can’t use the Chaos Emeralds. Sonic isn’t conscious to tell him what to do. He can’t follow Sonic’s path if he isn’t awake to make said decisions. This was hopeless. He was going to die and the entire timeline was going to be rewritten. His Sonic is going to cease to exist and probably everything else he’s grown to love. He wonders why he even tried to build anything. Why did he even bother? It all lead to this. He was just living in a temporary state of bliss. Why did he even think he could have anything without it getting ripped away from him?

Shadow just accepts his fate. He slowly floats deeper and deeper into the depths of the ocean and thinks that this really isn’t that bad of a way to go. It was better than falling from space and burning through the atmosphere. It’s actually quite peaceful down here.

Shadow’s eyes open suddenly when he feels two arms grab him and he’s being pulled out of the water. It’s a moment, but his body resurfaces and he’s coughing and choking on water. His eyes meet Rouge and Knuckles who are helping him afloat.

“You okay, man?” Knuckles asks with concern.

“Please, say something, hon,” Rouge practically pleads to him.

“I can’t,” Shadow rasps out as he hangs his head, “I can’t do this.”

“Sure you can,” Knuckles says with fleeting confidence.

Shadow shakes his head, “Without the Chaos Emeralds there’s nothing I can do. He’s too powerful.” Shadow cringes when he says those words. He never thought it would ever come to that. He knew

he was evenly matched with Sonic. He knew he may or may not have a slight advantage over him. But he never would have guessed at any point in his life that Sonic would have a complete and colossal advantage over him. Not like this.

He feels like an idiot for not listening to Sonic more intently when he was trying to point this out to him. This whole time, Shadow was trying to protect him from harm because he was deemed a monster by many people and he had started to believe them. This is one outcome he would have never, ever predicted. He never thought Sonic would ever give into despair like this. Yet Sonic was telling him and warning him the whole time and he still refused to listen.

“You can do this, Shadow,” Rouge tells him with a serious tone, “You’re some kind of god too, right?”

“I’m no match... I’m...” Shadow looks down at his hands.

His mind delves into the past and what he had seen. Iblis’ power was sealed away into the Chaos Emeralds. He was Iblis. That power still lays dormant inside him. His eyes fall onto his inhibitors and a wave of realization hits. He was fighting this battle all wrong. He was trying to use control and precision, but he needed to release his shackles and fight with freedom. That’s how Sonic did it. He didn’t attack the beast, he warmed its icy heart.

Shadow turns to Knuckles and narrows his eyes, “I need you to hit me exactly like you had last time.”

Rouge is giving him a warm smile. She can tell when Shadow’s figured out a problem and she feels pride blooming in her chest. “Good luck, Shadow,” she says as she pulls him out of the water and back into the air.

She and Knuckles ride the rising wind currents once more and Shadow readies himself. He revs up in Rouge’s grasp and she waits for Knuckles to reel back his fist. She kicks Shadow toward Knuckles and Knuckles sends a hard hitting punch at Shadow. The hedgehog soars through the air once more and he holds his breath when he’s submerged into the monster’s body.

Mephiles is on the outside and projecting his voice all around Shadow, “Keep trying, Shadow. The outcome will be no different. It’s just entertaining to watch you try.”

Shadow disregards Mephiles’ words. They’re meaningless to him now. He has one objective in mind and that’s to save Sonic. Once he feels the water cool around him, Shadow unfolds from himself and pulls off his inhibitors one-by-one. They fall away from his ankles and wrists, dropping down from his grasp into the ocean below him. He closes his eyes and feels the warm energy around him begin to boil away at the beast’s body. He glances up at Sonic and boosts forward toward him.

“No,” Mephiles shouts with anger, “No! Don’t!”

The mixing of temperatures is intense, but Shadow continues. His body flares to life as he gets closer and closer to the immobile hedgehog. Once he gets close enough, Shadow holds his arms open and wraps them around Sonic’s frigid form. He blasts out of the monster’s head with Sonic in his arms and it lets out a painful wail. The monster slowly loses its form and sinks back down into the watery depths.

Shadow glances up at Mephiles as he tries to fly down at him. Shadow grits his teeth and closes his eyes before shouting, “Chaos Blast!” The explosion burns around him and thrusts Mephiles backward.



Mephiles heaves angrily, but notices as the last patches of his skin crystallizes and he begins to laugh loudly. He looks down at the two hedgehogs that are falling down to the surface of the water and bellows out with delight, "I'm complete! I'm finally complete! You lose!"

Shadow watches as the red gemstone glows just before the water engulfs him and Sonic. Shadow wills his thrusters to work, but he can't pull Sonic up with him. His body is too frozen and heavy. Shadow pulls him closer in an attempt to thaw him and he uses his Chaos Blast over and over until he can feel it straining on his body.

Sonic slowly thaws, but it isn't enough for Shadow to pull them up to the surface. If anything, it makes the situation worse because Sonic is staring back at him as he looks around in confusion. Sonic panics when he realizes where they are and all of the bubbles leave his mouth at once.

Shadow sees this and leans in, covering Sonic's mouth with his own. He gives Sonic the last of his oxygen as they fall deeper and deeper into the dark ocean. Shadow feels his head getting lighter and slowly losing consciousness. The last thing he sees is Sonic's worried eyes before white engulfs his vision.

# Unity



## Chapter Twenty-Two: Unity

Water trickles around him and it's deathly quiet. His eyes open and he has to blink a few times before his vision comes to. The first thing he sees in front of him is one of his rings and a small water current swirling around it. Shadow shakily lifts his hand to grab it and rolls onto his aching back.

He must be dead. There's no way he survived that. He just thought being dead would be a lot less painful.

He clicks his inhibitor in place and looks around him. It's blindingly white, but cold. He realizes that what he's seeing is snow.

Shadow sighs and lays his head back down into the shallow water. Yeah, he was dead. It's summer. There's no way it's snowing right now.

He glances to his right and sees another golden inhibitor. He snags it and clicks it onto his other wrist before pulling himself up all the way into a sitting position. The snow dances all around him and muffles any possible sounds. Even him moving in the water is quiet. Everything is so serene.

Shadow gets to his feet and looks around. He can see another one of his inhibitors a few feet away in the stream of water that's connected to the pool he's standing in. As he moves, the water moves with him and he stops to grab the next ring to snap it onto his ankle. He follows the stream of water and it follows back, expanding around him with each step.

When he sees the altar in the distance, he realizes where he is. It's Angel Island, but it looks different.

It's so surreally new and unblemished. He feels entranced to continue walking and makes his way up the stairs. He finds his last inhibitor on the steps and clicks it into place.

As he gets to the top, the Master Emerald is sitting in the center as the seven Chaos Emeralds rest on the pedestals around it.

Shadow gasps when he sees Sonic's form huddled on the ground shivering. He quickly makes his way to the hero's side and kneels down next to him, "Sonic? Sonic, are you alright?"

Sonic curls in closer to himself, but he manage to look up at Shadow. There's a faint smile and he goes to open his mouth to speak, but nothing comes out. Instead, he turns away and shivers more.

"What is it?" Shadow asks.

Sonic lets out a few quaking breaths and it hangs in the air. Which is strange because Shadow's breath isn't doing the same.

Shadow places his hand on Sonic's shoulder and feels just how cold it is. It's frozen solid. He tries to stretch Sonic's limbs apart, but Sonic opens his mouth in a silent scream in response. Shadow pulls his hands away quickly.

"What's wrong? What's happening?" Shadow asks with concern.

Sonic furrows his brow like he doesn't know. He tries to say something, but nothing comes out.

"You can't speak," Shadow concludes with surprise. He places his hand on Sonic's throat carefully and it's cold just like his limbs. His vocal chords must have frost crystallized on them preventing him from speaking.

Sonic closes his eyes and has a peaceful look on his face as he feels Shadow's hand on his throat.

Shadow gives him a concentrated look before letting chaos energy build up in his palm, warming the skin there.

Once it warms enough, Sonic takes in a straggled breath, but it seems like a good sign because Sonic is breathing regularly and coughing. He looks up at Shadow and whispers, "Hey..."

"Can you move?" Shadow asks carefully.

"Um..." Sonic mumbles quietly before he tries to move one of his legs. They twitch a little, but Sonic's face contorts into agony before resting his head back down, "No, dude. I don't think so..."

"What the hell happened to you?" Shadow asks with slight horror as he looks the hero up and down.

"Not gunna lie," Sonic responds quietly, "No clue."

"Do you remember anything?" Shadow asks with a frown.

"Uh..." Sonic closes his eyes and tries to rack his brain, "We... Oh yeah. We were fighting Mephiles, right?" Sonic opens his eyes and smiles up at Shadow, "Did we win?"

Shadow looks away and feels his heart break a little. He doesn't know what to say really.

"Got our butts kicked that bad, huh?" Sonic responds with a bummed out look, "There's always next time."

“I...” Shadow begins to say before he swallows back his emotions, “I don’t think there’s going to be a next time, Sonic.”

“Oh...” Sonic deflates a little, but turns his attention back to his legs. He tries to move them again, but winces a little, “Think you can do that thing you did...to my legs? I’m getting a little antsy.”

“Yes,” Shadow nods solemnly as he repositions himself in front of Sonic’s legs. The chaos energy flows through his palms again as he slowly thaws the hero’s legs.

Sonic starts up a conversation because everything seems too quiet for his liking, “Ya know, I thought it was a bad idea for Chaos and Iblis to put their powers in the emeralds, but then I got to thinking about something...”

“What’s that?” Shadow responds, more so paying attention to what he’s doing than Sonic’s words.

“We wouldn’t be here then,” Sonic states a bit dreamily, “It’s cool because like Chaos and Iblis can be reincarnated over and over again. So, if they die or if we die...we aren’t actually dead. Our souls are connected to the emeralds.”

Shadow’s hand stops when he hears Sonic’s words and he whispers, “Say that again.”

“We aren’t actually dead,” Sonic asks more than says, “Our souls are connected to the emeralds?”

Shadow looks over at the Master Emerald for a moment before furrowing his brow.

“Hey, uh...” Sonic states as he moves his legs around, but not to their full flexibility, “Wanna finish?”

“We aren’t dead,” Shadow murmurs softly.

“Yeah, that’s what I said,” Sonic reiterates impatiently and demands, “Now, fix my legs.”

Shadow gets up and rushes down the steps. He makes his way to the side of the island and looks down. There’s no water though. There’s nothing. It’s just white. Shadow whispers to himself, “Where are we?”

“Yo, Shads! Not cool! Get back here!” Sonic cries out to him, wiggling around like a worm on the ground.

Shadow makes his way back after he hears Sonic’s cries. He jumps up and rockets up to the top of the altar and finishes thawing Sonic’s legs. “I don’t know where we are,” Shadow states a bit urgently, “I don’t know what time period we’re in. There’s nothing.”

Sonic winces when he feels the warmth, but he’s more focused on moving his legs. They finally shoot up and Sonic quickly gets to his feet. He stretches them, even though his arms are frozen to his sides. All he really cares about are his legs. He’s just happy to move again. “Yes! Freedom!” Sonic shouts excitedly as he zooms around.

“This is serious, Sonic,” Shadow says angrily. He stomps over to the hero and pinpoints small bursts of energy at the joints in Sonic’s arms and smacks a large burst at his chest forcefully.

All the air leaves his lungs at the quick change in temperature and he shivers, water droplets shaking from his quills. “Woo! Man, that’s fresh,” Sonic shudders and rubs his arms. “Also, it’s hard to take anything in while I’m stationary like that,” Sonic explains with a pout, “Can’t concentrate when I feel trapped.” Sonic looks out and around like he just realized his surroundings and for a lack of a

better thing to say says, “Whoa.”

“Yes,” Shadow says like he’s losing his patience with Sonic, “I’ve been trying to tell you that—” Shadow’s voice trails off when there’s a sudden gust of wind and a large bird-like creature slowly rises into his line of sight. It darts off with a shrill cry.

“No, I was talkin’ about *that*,” Sonic states as he points at the flying monster.

“Is that Solaris?” Shadow questions as he unconsciously reaches for Sonic’s hand as he feels the terror bubbling up in his chest.

“You’d probably know more than me,” Sonic replies as he looks down at Shadow’s hand. He softens his eyes and squeezes his hand back in a comforting manner, “I’m gunna put my money on that theory though.” His hand slides away as he walks over to the Master Emerald.

“What are you doing?” Shadow asks with anger, “And where are you going?”

“Well, the Chaos Emeralds didn’t really work on Mephiles,” Sonic says nonchalantly as he hops onto the large green gem, “I think I got one last trick up my sleeve.”

Shadow narrows his eyes at him, “What are you talking about?”

Sonic disregards Shadow’s question and taps the tip of his foot on the gem, “Although, kinda wish Knuckles and Tails were here.”

Shadow shakes his head and says, “Sonic, I don’t know how much you remember, but Tails is…”

Shadow doesn’t even get a chance to open his mouth and finish because the sound of a propeller is cutting him off. He turns around and looks up at the blank white sky in disbelief. The blue plane was soaring down toward the island and landing on the snowy ground.

Sonic’s face brightens and he rushes over to the plane, “Tails, buddy, there you are!”

Shadow blinks like he’s having trouble comprehending this situation, “What on Earth…?”

Tails hops out of the plane and pulls Sonic into a tight hug, sobbing on top of his head, “I missed you so much, Sonic!”

Sonic flails his arms a bit and tries to breath, “Easy there, lil bro! What’s with the waterworks?”

Tails looks down at Sonic with a gruff look, “Whaddya mean!? I lost my older brother!”

“Who? Me?” Sonic laughs a little, “I’m right here.”

Tails’ face pales when those words register, “W-wait! What are *you* doing here anyway!?”

Shadow looks out at the large bird creature in the distance and makes his way over to the two, “Metal explained that he was going to use Solaris to rewrite history and control time and space. Perhaps it’s fracturing our timelines apart.”

“Dude, Metal can’t use Solaris,” Sonic explains as he places his hands on his hips, “Metal got wrecked in the future, remember?”

Shadow frowns at Sonic and responds, “That may be, but… According to the doctor’s reports, when Metal’s body is destroyed, his memories carry on to his next form. So, Metal is still inside that monster… somewhere.”

“Oh,” Sonic says as he scratches the side of his head, “Yeah... I forgot about that.”

Shadow points back to the altar and gives Sonic a stern look, “What were you saying before? About having another trick up your sleeve?”

Tails turns to Sonic with big, wide eyes, “Are you going to turn Hyper? You’ve only used it once!”

“Yeah...” Sonic says sheepishly, “I was gunna, but the last time I did it with Knuckles and he helped me stabilize it. So, like... it’s hard to control without him.”

“Well...” Tails looks away with a sad look, “I don’t think Knuckles is going to be able to help us out this time.”

“Why not?” Sonic asks, cocking his head to the side.

“Don’t you remember?” Tails says with tears pricking at the edges of his eyes, “I died. That means you’re dead too. We’re like... somewhere where space and time don’t exist.”

“No. What?” Sonic shakes his head and places his hands on Tails’ shoulders. When he sees Tails nod, he turns to Shadow for confirmation.

Shadow looks uncomfortable before nodding, “Yes... It’s true. You were filled with so much rage that your body converted the chaos energy inside you into negative energy and turned into Chaos. The Chaos on the mural you showed me years back.”

Sonic’s mouth hangs open when he hears that as he gives Shadow a disturbed look, “Did I hurt anyone?”

“From what I could tell... No,” Shadow shakes his head, “Although, you completely tore down my ego.” Shadow is silent for a moment before sending Sonic a slight smirk.

Sonic forces a smile because he knows Shadow is just trying to make him feel better. “Maybe it isn’t a good idea that I use my Hyper form then,” Sonic states as he rubs his arm, “What if like...” He glances off in the distance at the large bird-like creature.

“Why don’t you both try?” Tails suggests.

Sonic exchanges a look with Shadow, “Whaddya say?”

“I’ve never done anything like that before,” Shadow states with a grim tone, “I knew about my Super form from Gerald and the scientists, but I was never informed about anything called a Hyper form.”

“Well, I didn’t know until I met Knuckles,” Sonic responds with a smile, “Besides, those dull white coats weren’t there when it all went down. They couldn’t even recreate Chaos from an admittedly detailed mural. Knuckles was from the original echidna tribe. I mean, he lost his memories, but some stuff must have carried over if he knew about the Master Emerald.” When Shadow still doesn’t look convinced, Sonic holds his hand out to him, “It doesn’t hurt to try.”

Shadow looks down at Sonic’s hand and hesitantly lifts his, but Sonic’s the one to reach for it and twine their finger together.

“I don’t have a whole lot of equipment to work with, but I might be able to hook the Master Emerald up to something and give you a clear reading,” Tails explains as he hops back into the plane and pulls out a few devices and some wires.

“How did you get this stuff anyway?” Sonic asks even though he’s clearly impressed with him.

“I woke up in a desolate version of Emerald Hill and made my way over to the Chemical Plant. I gathered some supplies so I could rebuild my plane,” Tails explains as he pulls all of his gear into his arms, “As for why it’s here? That’s beyond me. Maybe it has something to do with Solaris, but I don’t really have the time to figure that out. I’m just glad it’s here.”

Sonic gives him a thumbs up, “That’s good enough for me.” He watches as Tails makes his way up the altar and begins twisting some wires and welding pieces together. He stays with Shadow and gives him a sad smile, “Is Silver okay?”

Shadow nods to him, “Yes, I told Miss Rose to look after here.”

Sonic sticks his tongue out at him, “Ew. Couldn’t let Rouge babysit? Also, stop calling her Miss Rose. Sounds like a crotchety old teacher.”

“That’s what you’re worried about when you ask if Silver’s alright?” Shadow questions with a dark look.

Sonic held a hand up in surrender and squeezes Shadow’s hand as an apology, “Glad the little guy is holding up alright. I just hope we don’t scar him for life from all of this.”

“This outcome is better than any other one I can think of,” Shadow states with a frown, “So, we can’t be doing any worse.”

“Eh,” Sonic shrugs and snickers, “Maybe it’ll give him character. Prepare him for the crap we’ll probably have to deal with in the future.”

Shadow just grunts and gives the ground a bleak look.

Sonic slides his hand to the side of Shadow’s face and looks into his eyes, “Hey, the kid’s gunna be fine.” When he sees Shadow look back up at him, his smile widens. Sonic leans in and kisses him.

Shadow pulls Sonic in closer and allows his hand to slide up the back of the hero’s head. He turns his head to the side and deepens their kiss. He whispers against the hero’s lips, “I love you. I hope I say that enough.”

Sonic smiles and leans in, connecting their lips again. He holds it, just to feel the warmth and responds after their lips separate, “You do, Shads. You’re doing a stellar job at being my white knight too.”

Shadow feels his face heat up before looking away, “I… I’m not…”

“No,” Sonic shakes his head and laughs a little playfully, “I’m starting to enjoy it.”

Tails’ voice travels down to them as he shouts, “Hugs and kisses later, guys! We have a whole space-time continuum to save!”

“C’mon,” Sonic says as he gently coaxes Shadow into following him.

They walk up the steps of the altar together hand-in-hand. Shadow lifts Sonic up onto the Master Emerald and Sonic holds his hand out for Shadow. He grabs it and is pulled up. They stand together with their hands connected.

Shadow whispers to Sonic, “You remember those words you spoke before, correct?”

“Drilled in my head,” Sonic responds with a laugh, “Thanks to Knuckles.”

“Alright, I’ll check the energy readings. You two do your thing,” Tails explains to them as he looks down at the device in his hands.

Sonic and Shadow close their eyes and the blue hero begins to recite the words. The Chaos Emeralds begin to glow before their bright, colorful energy beam out into the Master Emerald. The Master Emerald glows with that same brilliant light. The energy surges inside Sonic’s body and his blue begins to fade to a iridescent white, gleaming different colors in the light. When the transformation is complete, the emeralds die down again and Sonic opens his eyes.

“It didn’t work,” Shadow states as he looks down at himself and then back to Sonic.

“What?” Sonic looks Shadow over with confusion, “But how come?” Sonic glances down at Tails and asks, “What’s goin’ on?”

“Well...” Tails begins to say, “The readings are a lot different than the Chaos Emeralds that’s for sure. It seems like the energy can only gather at one specific point. Unlike the Chaos Emeralds that burst out energy for multiple different targets to acquire...The Master Emerald is concentrating all of that energy from the Chaos Emeralds into one location.”

“Meaning?” Sonic asks a little bored.

“Only one of you can use the Hyper form at a time,” Tails concludes with a frown.

“And it chose you,” Shadow states as he motions to Sonic.

“Well, how the heck were Chaos and Iblis supposed to use this form?” Sonic asks as he crosses his arms impatiently, “That sounds really stupid.” Sonic’s eyes widen when he feels a shift in the energy and he falls to his knees from the sheer force. “Hey, uh... Anyway you can like... make this form chill out?”

Tails just gives him a concerned look, “Afraid not. I don’t have nearly enough power or materials to create a buffer. You’re going to have to use it as is.”

Sonic lets out a sigh, “Aw, man. My body is gunna hurt tomorrow. Ya know, if there *is* tomorrow.”

“Wait,” Shadow says, stopping him. He gets down to his knees and unclasps his inhibitors. He begins to hook them into place around Sonic’s wrists and ankles. He waits and watches as the energy flows and harmonizes around Sonic’s body. In turn though, Shadow’s powers begins burning to life.

“This isn’t gunna work,” Sonic says with a frown.

“It already has,” Shadow states, wincing as the golden energy is swirling around him.

“But what about you?” Sonic asks quietly.

“What about me?” Shadow says with a stern look, “I’m one life in a world of billions. Or, for timeline’s sake, infinite numbers of lives.”

Sonic lifts his hand and twines their fingers together, “I need you though. I can’t do this alone.”

Shadow shakes his head, “It’s fine, Sonic. Perhaps this is penance for Iblis’ closed-mindedness on mortals.”

Sonic glares at Shadow and grabs his other hand and shouts, “No! We’re... We’re a family. What



happened to when one of us hurts we're all hurting? What happened to never giving up? Stop putting me above you! We're a unit!"

Shadow feels the pull and flow of energy, moving back and forth like waves. He takes in Sonic's words and gives him a concentrated look. "We're... a unit," Shadow whispers thoughtfully.

"Yeah," Sonic nods, "That's what I said."

"Why did it take me this long to realize?" Shadow questions to himself before staring deep into the hero's eyes, "You're brilliant, Sonic."

"Uh..." Sonic looks away a bit embarrassed and says, "I wouldn't say that..."

"Yes, you are," Shadow repeats as he helps Sonic back to his feet. He positions the hero in the center of the Master Emerald's platform as he stands behind him.

"Wh-what're you doing?" Sonic asks, a bit nervous.

Shadow leans in and whispers in his ear for only him to hear, "I'm submerging myself into your depths completely."

"Uh..." Sonic feels his cheeks burning bright as he mumbles back, "Dude, not cool. My bro is right here."

Shadow just chuckles lowly and lines himself up with the blue hero. He slides his left hand up Sonic's arm and they phase together. Shadow does the same with Sonic's other arm. He steps forward into Sonic's feet and as their chest align Sonic's head hangs from his shoulders as if he's lost consciousness. Shadow leans his head down into Sonic's as if he were wearing his skin and their head rises up once more in unison, the corners of their eyes remaining black. The red gemstone glows with a yellow hue around it and the hedgehog's front spike flare up like flames. The remaining back spines hang down into two long ones. The green gem on their chest lights up with a blue aura as white fur plumes out all the way over their shoulders. They feel the energy radiating to their hands and feet as the blues and yellows swirl around and morph into a soft teal. The hedgehog slowly opens their eyes and their irises are golden like the energy around their forehead.

Tails just looks up at the entity in awe and drops the device in his hands out of pure astonishment, "Who... Who are you?"

The hedgehog looks down at their hands and then down at Tails, "I... I'm not sure."

"Sonic..." Tails asks a bit shakily, "Or Shadow?"

They place their hands on their chest and slide them up and down in confusion, "Both. Or... maybe neither?"

"You look like Silver," Tails states before grasping his head, "Oh my gosh! You're Silver! You guys fused!"

"We did?" They asks before lowering his voice a bit, "I... did?"

"Okay," Tails says, trying to calm himself down as he points at the large flying creature in the distance, "You gotta like... Fight that and save the world, okay?"

"Wait," Silver says with a wavering look, "But I don't know who I am. I just... came into existence? And..." They shake their head and states a bit gruffly, "No, that doesn't matter. I have to..." They

grip their head and hunch over, "There's too many voices!"

Tails gives the hedgehog an angry look before shouting, "Guys, stop fighting! You have to work together!"

Silver stops for a moment and has a blank expression on their face. They slowly look up at Tails with an intense concentration.

Tails smiles when he sees he's gotten their undivided attention, but before he can say anything a large beam of energy hits the small landmass they're on. The earth crumbles away and Silver gasps when he sees Tails losing his balance and falling into the nothingness below them.

Without a second thought, Silver jumps down after him and tenses their body so they're darting down faster toward him. Silver opens their arms and holds Tails close to their body before they're encased with a teal light and are floating in the air.

Tails opens his eyes and sees that they've stopped falling. He looks up at Silver and sees the soft, concerned gaze of his brother and the intense focused eyes of Shadow looking back at him at once. "Thank you," Tails says with relief.

"No problem," Silver responds with a confident smile, but looks up at the monster in the distance with a serious look, "but I must stop Solaris as soon as possible."

"Yeah," Tails nods back, "My thoughts exactly." Tails eyes the landmass with a calculative look and sees his plane that's half hanging off. His brows shoot up when the teal energy fades and they begin to descend again. Tails quickly grabs the hedgehog's arms and uses his twin tails to fly them back up. When they land, Tails smiles at them with a sympathetic look, "You can only use that for a short period of time like I can, huh?"

Silver just looks down at their body before looking back up at Tails, "I'm surprised I can fly at all. It's... really strange." Silver feels a smile threatening his lips though as they continue, "but it's also exciting."

"I bet," Tails smiles back with a laugh, "Sonic always wanted the ability to fly." Tails' frown drops a little when he says that and he glances back at Silver, "Is my brother still in there somewhere?"

"I think so," Silver replies with a bit of confusion as a small grin reaches their face, "There's a part of me that wants to wrap you in a big hug and ruffle your hair." Their grin falls a bit before saying, "There's also a part of me that feels uncomfortable about doing that though."

"Well," Tails snickers and wraps his arms around Silver and hugs them tightly, "Bring it in, buddy! Don't be shy!"

A small laugh falls from Silver's lips as they hugs him back and ruffles his hair a little. They stop when they look out into the distance and say, "We should really get going though. I don't know how good that thing's aim is."

Tails nods and pulls away. He makes his way over to his plane and hops in, starting up the engine. He doesn't wait for Silver to get on. Instead, he lifts the plane up and comes back around. He sees Silver waiting at the edge for him and he angles it down like how he and Sonic have practiced a million times. There's a spark of hope in his heart when Silver jumps at just the right moment and lands on the wing that tells him that Sonic is in fact in there somewhere.

As Tails' plane glides further and further toward the beast, there's remnants of memories that seem to have been lost in time. Pieces of Green Hill and the Chemical Plant and even structures from Sky

Sanctuary scattered about. There's no rhyme or reason to any of it. This thing really was messing with timelines, but how much of its mind is still coherent after turning into Solaris? Was it actually rewriting anything or just consuming what it could?

"Watch out!" Silver cries out.

Tails' eyes widen as a structure is hurdling toward the small plane. Tails pulls on the yoke to get some lift, but it doesn't look like it's going to be enough.

Silver glares at it and places their hand on the metal wing. Their lip curls into a snarl as they empty their energy into the plane and lift it up as if it was defying gravity. When the plane dodges the structure, Silver slides their hand away from the wing and it stabilizes again.

"Nice save," Tails calls out to him.

Silver just looks back down at him with a smile and nods before averting their attention back in front of them.

They get closer and closer to the large bird, but as they do they're reminded of just how big this thing is. Possibly not as big as other foes they've fought in the past, but it's still impressively big.

Silver glares at it and shouts, "I'm going to get closer to see if it has any weak points. I want you to stay here."

Tails gives him a look of disbelief, "No way! Just point me in the right direction and I'll bring you there."

"It isn't safe," Silver goes on to explain.

"It isn't safe anywhere," Tails retaliates with a frown, "That thing has a long range attack. Regardless if I'm close to it or not I can be a target."

"I don't want to lose you," Silver says with a sad tone.

"You won't," Tails says with a bright smile, "I promise. Besides, we'll be stronger as a unit."

Silver's eyes widen when they hears that. They gives Tails a contemplative look before giving him a nod, "Okay. We do this together."

Tails promised himself he wouldn't cry, but he can feel tears threatening the corners of his eyes. It's been so long since he's heard that. Like, really heard that. He tries not to let his nostalgic thoughts cloud his mind as he darts the plane forward and around pieces of floating clutter in the sky. "How ya doing?" Tails asks as he continues to dodge objects, "Too rough of a ride."

Silver just shakes their head, eyes still locked onto the monster, "No, nothing's going to shake me. Do what you need to."

Tails smirks up at Silver as he sees the confident stance they're in on the wing of the plane. It reminds him of Sonic so much. Although, a more calm and mature Sonic. He continues to weave through debris with everything he's got, certain Silver has a solid foothold.

Silver holds their hands out and gets used to the energy flow. They can feel it gathering at their palms as their mind quells the intense energy and stabilizing it throughout their body. It feels less like an erratic explosion and more of a steadfast wave that is ready to bend at their command. So, when they see another piece of debris hurdling toward them, they unleash the energy and stop it midair, sending

it hurdling back toward Solaris.

It hits the large beast, but does minimal damage. Solaris is heavily armored. Unlike Chaos, it doesn't have much of a visible weak point. Silver tries to think of Iblis and if there was any notable weaknesses. The memory is very foggy though. Only Shadow had seen that and it was in a vision. One he was startled by more than strictly observant in. They do remember Sonic attempting to tame it though.

"That's enough," Silver states.

Tails glances up in confusion, "Whaddya mean?"

"There's no point in getting closer than this," Silver explains as they widens their stance, "Solaris might have long range attacks, but so do I."

Tails just nods back and begins to steer the plane to the side, following the monster's speed but keeping a distance. The air is getting choppy though from the frequent gusts of wind from the large beast's flapping wings. It helps that Silver is clearing the objects flying toward them, so he puts his full trust in Silver when it comes to that and focuses on keeping them steady. Although, it seems like no matter how large the object thrown at Solaris is, it doesn't seem to be budging.

"Do you think we can actually take this thing down?" Tails asks a bit wearily.

Silver just gives their opponent a determined stare before stating confidently, "We must. It isn't a matter of if we can, it's a matter of figuring out how. Don't lose hope, Tails."

"Right," Tails smiles at them and feels the confidence radiating off them, gaining some more of his own. He continues to weave through the objects and keep the plane balanced at the same time.

A large building hurdles their way though and Silver holds their hands out trying to stop it. The mass and speed of it prevents it from being budged though. Silver braces themselves on the plane and their palm collides with the wing. They hear Tails gasp and they don't want to let him down. Silver closes his eyes and concentrates.

Just as they're going to hit, they flash through it unharmed. Tails takes a moment to gather what happened and hangs his head out of the plane, looking back at the building they had dodged in the distance. "Whoa! Was that Chaos Control?" Tails asks, clearly impressed.

"Maybe," Silver states as he looks down at his palm, "It might have been a more subdued version. More like a dash than anything."

"Like a teleport dash?" Tails says with a sly look.

Silver glances back down at Tails and their face is stern for a moment before melting into a smile of their own, "You should start naming our abilities."

"I'll take a mental note of that. Ya know, when we aren't in the middle of saving space and time," Tails explains as he levels the plane again, "I wouldn't mind hooking you up to one of my own scanners and taking some serious notes though."

"Are you seriously going to make me your guinea pig?" Silver retorts with a huff as they fold their arms across their chest, although they're noticeably joking because they're wearing a visible smile still.

"I don't need to," Tails shoots back with a laugh, "You're already a hedgehog."

Silver shakes their head and silently loses themselves in a fit of restrained laughter.

Another gust of wind hammers at the plane and throws them off course a bit. When Silver gets their bearings again, they see the laser headed right for them. They lift their hand up and feel the chaos energy swirling there before whipping their hand out, deflecting the beam of energy outward. They watch as it hits a nearby building and it crumbles apart on impact. Silver gasps when he feels the gravity of the plane pulling back and notices small black holes all around them. Time must be so fractured that it's starting to implode in on itself. Silver grits their teeth and places their hand on the wing of the plane again. They manage to teleport the plane away from the gravitational pull, but Silver feels their footing slipping. They're far enough away that the plane isn't affected, but Silver's body is smaller in mass. They try to hold onto the plane, but are thrust backwards.

Tails holds his hand out and cries out to them, "Silver!!!"

Silver looks around in a panic and tries to teleport away. The moment they do, their back collides with some debris and they lose consciousness for a moment. A fractured building comes up behind them and they smash through the window. Silver blinks their focus back and gets to their feet. They start to run, but notice just how slow they're going. "What the...?" Silver looks down at their legs and tries to keep up their pace. They try to focus on Shadow and how he boosts forward using chaos energy. Silver gives the window on the other end a determined look and encases his body in teal energy before blasting out it, hovering in the air. Silver looks up and sees just how far away they've fallen from the plane. They try to fly up, but they've reached the peak in their stamina. Silver drops down to a piece of rubble and tries to catch their breath, using this time to observe their surroundings.

Silver winces when he feels the gusts of wind getting stronger and he's flung from the platform he was on. They angle themselves onto another, but it crumbles away the moment their feet meet it. They're suddenly spinning back into nothingness and they can feel their anxiety rising. "I can't..." Silver murmurs as he feels his mind splitting, "I can't..." They reach their arm up desperately as they see the plane getting smaller and smaller from their eyesight. "I... I wish you were here," Silver whispers as if they're recollecting Sonic's memories of him falling and Shadow catching him. "I can't even save myself," Silver whispers pitifully, "I can't even save *us*."

Silver's face drops when they see the large structure coming into view. Whether it's coming closer to them or they're falling closer to it, it's unclear; but it's at this point Silver really starts freaking out. Silver shakes his head in disbelief, "No... No, don't. I don't want to go back."

The space colony is getting bigger and bigger into their view and it looks like it's on a collision course to them. Just as it's about to hit, Silver closes their eyes and warps away trying to escape it, but instead teleports inside.

## Shadows of the Past



### Chapter Twenty-Three: Shadows of the Past

Their body falls back onto the familiar metallic ground and their back meets one of the walls from the momentum. “I can’t...” Silver whispers and shakes their head, “I can’t...” Silver grits their teeth and forces their eyes open with a determined look, “No, I can’t... *give up!*” They rush to the window and look out. They’re traveling further and further away from Solaris. They can barely make it out from here and Tails’ plane is long since been visible.

“Oh my...” A voice says from down the hall a bit in shock, “I didn’t think we’d ever meet again.”

Silver freezes. Their joints feel stiff and they don’t want to turn around.

It doesn’t seem to matter either way. The careful footsteps come closer and her figure comes into view in the reflection of the window. “It’s strange how life works, isn’t it?” Her voice isn’t sad though. It’s cheerful. Like she’s dreamed of this meeting for awhile.

Silver doesn’t have a problem recognizing her. It’s as if her face was always engraved in their mind. They look down and away, “I’m sorry.”

She looks confused when she hears that, “You have nothing to apologize for.”

“But... I...” Silver looks down at their hands with regret.

“Look at me,” she says like a gentle demand as her delicate hands guide his face forward, “I saved you because you deserve a good life and you deserve to be happy. My time was coming to an end

and that's okay. I enjoyed the good times we shared together. It was time to set you free."

Silver feels the tears threatening their eyes, "I've done... so much bad."

She gives them a sympathetic smile, "It's okay. We all do bad things out of desperation. While yes they're permanent, the good we do for the world is also permanent. Just remember that."

Silver lifts their hand to the one that's holding their face and they feel a tear stream down their cheek, "Thank you, Maria."

She smiles softly down at them, "Don't let the setbacks restrain you forever, okay?"

Silver nods their head.

Another voice calls out from the corridors and echoes out, "Maria? Maria? Where has that girl run off to now?"

Maria's face lights up and she takes Silver by the hand, running down the hall, "Come! Grandfather will want to see you too!"

Silver gives her a panicked look, "But... But you shouldn't be running like this!"

She smiles at them from over her shoulder, "It's okay. I'm not in pain anymore."

A whole new emotion wells up in their chest. Relief. Happiness because she's no longer suffering.

Maria guides them to the voice and she cries out, "Grandfather! Grandfather! Guess who has visited us!"

Gerald appears from down one of the corridors and looks shocked when he sees his granddaughter carting Silver along with her. He swallows before saying, "But how can this be?" He squats down to Silver's level and examines them, poking and prodding at them like one of his experiments.

Silver gives the scientist a frown and smacks his hand away, "Hey, watch it!"

Maria looks surprised by the outburst, but finds herself giggling.

"A bit feistier than I remember," Gerald comments and gives Silver one last once over, "but how are you able to hold that form? It was... It was impossible."

"I don't have time for this," Silver states dismissively as their eyes glance out the window once more, "There's a time eating monster that's destroying every timeline in existence and I need to get back and fight it. I just don't know how I'm going to do that."

Gerald readjusts his glasses and gives him a smirk, "Well, my boy, I've got just the thing."

"Do you mean?" Maria responds with a small gasp.

Silver turns and gives the scientist a skeptical look, "What is it, professor?"

Gerald guides them down the way all the way to the eclipse cannon. The seven emeralds are already embedded inside the machine. He begins to explain, "Your body should be able to utilize the power of the Chaos Emeralds and I can use it to shoot you back as far as I can. It'll be up to you to travel the rest of the way."

Silver eyes the machine with awe and asks, "Do you think it will work?"

“I guarantee it,” the scientist states as he fiddles with his mustache in a confident manner, “It was made by studying the emeralds’ power. Your body was reconstructed with that same power. You will definitely be compatible with it.”

“Okay,” Silver states with a determined look.

“You will need to use some of the energy to tap into your super form first,” Gerald goes on to explain.

“So, this will be good-bye,” Silver concludes with a frown.

“I’m afraid so,” Gerald responds with a nod.

“It’ll be okay,” Maria says with a cheery tone, “We’re still connected. Every time we share a memory, it’s like another little visit.”

Silver finds himself smiling at that and unable to restrain themselves from pulling Maria into a tight hug, “I remember you often.”

Maria runs her hand through his quills in a manner that seems way too surreal to be true, “As do I.” She pulls away and looks back at her grandfather.

Silver stands awkwardly before him and doesn’t really know how to react, “Um... Thank you, Gerald.” They hold their hand out to the man to shake.

Gerald’s smile widens and he takes Silver’s hand, but pulls them in closer for a hug. “I’m sorry,” he tells them, “I should have been there for you more. I was so caught up in my work.”

Silver feels their eyes welling up a bit and he swallows their emotions down thickly, “It’s... It’s okay. You did the best you could.” Silver pulls back enough to look him in the face, “Being a father isn’t an easy feat.”

“Thank you for understanding, my boy,” Gerald says with a sad smile, “It’s more than I deserve.”

Silver takes in a deep breath, trying to quell the emotions that are bubbling up inside them. It’s hard to say good-bye, but it’s bittersweet. It’s the kind of closure they’ve always wished for.

Silver turns back to the emeralds and holds their hands out, closing their eyes. They can feel the energy from them begin to surge through their body. Their body tinges with gold and their eyes turn red. Silver lifts a hand behind his head and curves it upward with the arch of the longer quills in back. They chuckle a bit under their breath at that before they open their eyes and looks back at Gerald and Maria. “Good-bye,” Silver says to them.

The professor waves them off with a smile.

Just as Silver turns away to prepare to warp into the cannon’s core, they hear her voice.

“Good-bye, Shadow.”

Their body seizes for a moment and they swallow down his emotions. They can feel the part of them that is Shadow crumbling apart. So, Silver turns with a smile on their face and declares with confidence, “Don’t worry, Maria. This isn’t good-bye. The fact that we’re here now is proof we’ll meet again.”

She looks stunned for a moment. As if she never thought she’d hear those words spoken to her.



Tears glisten in her eyes as she nods to them.

Silver nods back before letting their body phase into the machine. It's quiet for a moment, but they can feel the intense thrust forward as the cannon shoots them out into the barren land around them. Getting closer and closer to Angel Island. Silver's body takes over with carrying them forward. With their Super form, the energy it takes to fly isn't being depleted as rapidly. They give the ARK one last glance before facing their destination.

A smile forms on their face when they see a familiar plane soaring through the sky, "It's a miracle!"

Silver boosts forward to meet halfway with Tails, not needing to get on the wing of the plane this time. "The Chaos Emeralds are called miracle gems for a reason," Silver states with a smirk.

"What happened? How are you doing that?" Tails asks with bewilderment.

Silver just shakes their head, "I just met with an old friend. Let's finish this." They boost forward, Tails in tow. The super powered hedgehog clears the area for them, carving a visible path for them to take. Solaris sends large buildings their way and Silver is easily able to push them aside this time around.

"While you were gone, I think I found it's weakness," Tails shouts over the whipping winds, "My readings are picking up a molten core within its body. If we can somehow break the heavy armor on it..."

"...We can remove the soul of Iblis from it," Silver finishes with a lowered brow, "And without that it's four against three."

Tails seems confused for a moment as he begins to count on his fingers. The words finally register and he laughs a bit sheepishly, "Right."

Silver tests that theory. Their arms extend out and levitate two large buildings before flinging them one after another at Solaris.

The beast falters back a little, but it doesn't seem like it's enough. It cries out in anger and sends more debris at them. Seemingly coming from black holes all around it. If that's the case, this thing has an unlimited amount of ammo to fling at them.

Which is fine by Silver since they can just throw it right back at it. Silver puts their powers to the test. They suspend objects in the air one-by-one and let it morph into one large pile of debris. They keep collecting as more and more pieces are being thrown at them. Even when they feel their limits being pushed, they hold on.

Tails just watches in awe at the large mass forming over Silver's head. He winces, wanting to warn them to be careful. That if it gets too large it could backfire and end up falling on them, but he believes that they know what they're doing.

Silver feels the weight heavy on their mind, wincing as he tries to hold it together. They wait though until they see their opening. They cry out and hold their arms out in the direction of Solaris. The large mass is hurled at the beast and knocks it back, dazing it a bit. Silver's eyes widen when they see the cavity open a bit and the aura of the molten core shining brightly. "There," Silver shouts as they fly forward with all of their might. They get closer and closer and fuse with it just as the armor closes around them.

"Silver!" Tails cries out anxiously when the armor clamps down on them.

*“Why?”*

Silver slowly opens their eyes when they hear the familiar voice.

*“No matter what I do, why can’t I kill you! I am you! I...!”*

There’s sobbing shortly after and Silver levels themselves a bit. They see in front of them a mangled Metal, sparking as its red eyes glitch in and out. Silver feels both compelled to attack and feel pity for it.

*“This wasn’t my fault. I just wanted... my life. I wanted...”*

Silver floats over toward the robot when they see that it isn’t attacking anymore.

*“You took... everything... from me.”*

Silver frowns at that and holds their hands out, “I did.”

*“Let me just...”* There’s a garbled mess mechanical noises before it continues, *“...win! Let me win! Let me have the life you stole!”*

“We can’t change the past,” Silver murmurs as they place their hands on its cool metal face, “History is written and it can be rewritten as many times as we like, but there is always a cause and effect.”

*“I don’t c-c-c-care!!!”* The voice module cuts off and then back on, *“c-c-care!!!”*

“Sonic,” Silver whispers as they pulls the robot into their arms, “I’ve been cold toward you for many years.”

The sobbing continues, harder now as a creaky arm lifts up and rests against Silver’s back.

“You’re just a kid suspended in time. Encased in a shell of a person you only hoped to be,” Silver continues and holds him tighter, “You were the terrifying reminder of what I could have been. I let those fears freeze my own actions and stop myself from trying to save you. I’m sorry.”

*“You took everything from me!!!”* The robotic fingers dig into Silver’s shoulders out of anger and anguish.

Silver winces at the pain, but doesn’t let go. Not yet. Their fingers dig into the metal shell of the body before pulling it apart completely. Wires and gears fly apart and the robot’s eye dull down to a black screen. They pull the metal away, piece by piece until the small, blue hedgehog is revealed and they cradle it in their arms. Alive, warm, and very much organic.

He buries his face into Silver’s chest and cries harder.

“Sonic,” Silver states as they look down at the crying hedgehog in their arms, “There’s still a timeline that needs you.”

The small hedgehog lifts his head and locks eyes with the super powered hero, “What?”

Silver nods to him, “I abandoned my own timeline. I took from you. It’s only fair I give back to you.”

There’s a shine in his eyes when he hears that.

“But you need to promise me something,” Silver states a bit sternly, “You must to be the hero it

needs. Understand?”

The small hedgehog nods.

“And... So, our timelines don’t merge... the moment you get off little planet and arrive at Station Square... You must find and rescue Shadow before the doctor does,” Silver explains carefully.

“Shadow,” the hedgehog smiles and wraps his arms around Silver’s neck.

This whole time, Metal Sonic was just a child. One who was abandoned and lonely and had lost everything. There wasn’t anything to prevent the past from happening or the suffering he had went through, but it’ll just make him that much stronger.

Silver lifts their hand up as a portal opens. It’s of little planet and Stardust Speedway. They place the child down and motion toward it.

The hedgehog floats toward it, but before phasing into it turns back to Silver and waves them good-bye before disappearing.

Silver allows a smile to melt across their face before lifting their hand and waving back. They gasp when they hear a loud noise and the world around them collapses. The walls fade from white to oceanic blue and Silver is gasping for air.

They see two arms reaching out for them and Silver reaches back. Their body is pulled out of the water and they inhale deeply before looking around. Everything looks untouched as if the water had never risen. Tails’ house is untouched on the familiar little hillside.

“That’s a good look for you, big bro.”

Silver’s face drops when they hear that and they slowly look up. Their eyes well up when they see Tails holding onto their arms and hanging by his legs on a latter coming from the chopper.

The chopper lands on the hilltop and the others file off it. Although, Silver is still in disbelief. They grab the fox by the arms and ask, “How are you alive? I thought Mephiles killed you!”

“What?” Tails asks with a laugh, “No way. I went with you, Shadow, and Knuckles to stand off against him. He demolished my mech suit, but Shadow saved me at the last minute, remember? And then, Omega tried firing at him from the roof.” Tails rolls his eyes before snickering, “I have a lot of work to do. Between rebuilding my mech and rebuilding Omega’s body from scratch. It shouldn’t be too hard though. I’ve done it before. I can do it again.”

They don’t remember any of that happening. He told Tails to stay behind, not...

Silver glances up at the platform on the train station. There stands a blue hero looking down at them and giving them a thumbs up before disappearing behind a flash of light. Silver blinks a few times like they couldn’t believe it. Was that... Metal?

“Earth to big bro,” Tails says as he waves his hand in front of their face, “You gotta tell me how you got that new form!”

“I uh...” Silver glances around at their friends before resting on Amy who is holding baby Silver. They silently makes their way over to her and place their hand on the child’s head.

Amy exchanges a sad look with them before whispering, “You didn’t get the soul back, did you?”

“No,” they say solemnly, “I... needed it for something else.”

Amy just looks away with tears in her eyes before nodding, “I understand.”

“I might have another solution though,” Silver states as they place a comforting hand on her shoulder before warping them away from the others. They reappear in the GUN base and just as the soldiers around them are going to open fire, Silver waves their hand and stops time completely. They make their way up to the stasis capsule and stare down at Blaze’s body.

Something seems to click in their mind. A memory. One that may or may not be theirs.

Shadow’s labored breath fills the air as he trudges through the embers of destruction.

“I know you’re out there, Shadow,” Metal’s voice shouts out playfully, “You can’t hide from me forever!”

Shadow gasps as his foot catches on a piece of debris. He closes his eyes and hits the ground. He caused this. All of this destruction. His powers. They were... Shadow winces and opens his eyes. One eye flashing green. No, he was losing control again. He couldn’t let Metal take control of his body again.

Shadow looks up and hears the sobbing of a child. His face contorts into anguish. No... He killed so many innocent lives.

He picks his body back up and rushes over to the distressed cries. He collapses onto his knees when he sees the small cat girl. In pain. In complete despair.

Shadow winces and fights Metal’s control once more. No, he couldn’t let him have him. He couldn’t let his power fall into the wrong hands.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry for what I’ve done,” Shadow whispers before ripping the stone out of his forehead and placing it into hers. “You’ll be safe now,” he tells her quietly.

She quiets down to a lulling sleep. Her chest rising and falling as a peaceful slumber falls upon her.

Shadow smiles lightly before wincing again. His body wouldn’t last in this condition and he had to depart from her. If Metal were to find his body next to hers, she would be dead as well.

In the distance, Shadow’s body collapses and Metal finds him. Angrily, he shouts, “What have you done!?” There’s a flash of light and the two are gone from sight.

Not too far away, another voice cries out, “Shadow!? Shadow! Answer me! Let me know you’re alright!”

The voice disturbs the sleeping girl and she chokes on her sobs through the dusty air.

The hero rushes toward the sound and stops when he sees her. He slowly falls to his knees when he sees the red stone in her forehead. He places his hand on it and she seems to calm down. “Hey there. There’s nothing to worry about,” the hero states with a smile, “I’m here now. I’m going to protect you.”

She pulls herself up a bit dazed and gives him a sad look, “Who are you?”

“My name is Sonic. I’m... the king of this world,” the hero says in a wavering voice, “Do you remember anything?”

She shakes her head back and forth, “No, but... I think I was chosen by the flames.”

“You were,” Sonic smiles warmly at her, “and you’re the princess now. I’m going to take care of you, okay?”

A small smile forms on her face, “That would be nice. Thank you.”

The hero pulls himself up and outstretches his hand to her. She takes it and is pulled out of the debris. They slowly walk out of the wreckage and Blaze holds his hand a bit tighter, trying to stay strong as she takes in the destruction around her. She’s scared, but as long as Sonic is here everything feels okay.

When Silver comes back to, they grit their teeth and rip the gem out of their forehead. Their body lights up with a bright white light and Sonic’s body falls forward onto the ground. Shadow glares down at the stone before pressing the buttons to open the stasis chamber.

It hisses as it opens and he places the red gemstone back into Blaze’s forehead where it belongs.

“Shadow...” Sonic manages to say before stumbling to get to his feet, “Why...? Your mind was finally at peace and your powers were finally in control.”

“I took from her unjustly,” Shadow states as he waits for her eyes to open. He offers his hand to her and she hesitantly takes it. He helps her out of the chamber and holds his hand out to Sonic, “Take us out of here.”

“Um...” The blue hero takes Shadow’s hand before turning to Amy who is stone still because of the time stop. He screws his face up in disgust before poking her shoulder before initiating Chaos Control.

They appear back at Mystic Ruins by what remains of Tails’ workshop and Amy gasps when she sees that Blaze is alive and well. Amy’s eyes sparkle with happiness as she looks in Sonic’s direction.

“I knew you could do it!” She shouts with excitement. She goes to wrap her arms around Sonic and Sonic sidesteps at the last minute, snags Silver, and watches her stumbling forward into Blaze’s arms.

Sonic snickers at it and Shadow kind of elbows him.

Amy looks away shyly and says, “Thank you...”

“Of course, Lady Rose,” Blaze states as she places her back onto stable footing.

Sonic does smile though because he is legitimately happy. He side glances where Shadow should be and notices that he’s already walking away. He catches back up with him and says, “Hey, wait up! Sorry about the whole fusion thing. Maybe Tails can figure out how to harness the Master Emerald and...”

“No,” Shadow states sternly with a sharp shake of his head, “That isn’t necessary. There can be only one Silver in this timeline.”

Sonic looks down at the child in his arms and his frown deepens.

“Besides, I can live with the turmoil and lack of control. There’s one thing I can’t live without,” Shadow says with confidence.

“What’s that,” Sonic asks, legitimately curious.

Shadow takes a step forward and places a hand on Sonic’s cheek. His eyes take in every detail and feature of it before answering, “Not being able to see your face again.”

Sonic rubs the back of his neck and blushes, “Aw, man. You can’t actually mean that.”

Shadow nods with certainty and places a kiss on his lips, “I do.”

Sonic’s heart flutters in his chest a little. The words ‘I do’ ring in his head and he feels the anxiety rising in his chest, but this time he’s okay with it. He’s excited about it.

“Are you alright now?” Shadow questions.

Sonic takes a minute to think it over. So much has happened and he’s uncovered a lot of stuff he wished he hadn’t, but at the same time it’s probably better this way. He nods once with sureness and smiles, “Yeah, I think so. I was too worried about being a hero others needed, but I can only be the hero I already am. If other people can’t accept that, it’s on them.” He snickers and continues, “I should have known that from the beginning though. Especially when you asked me if GUN ever took Silver and my answer was just to bust ‘im out. I guess I can’t be the hero every time.”

Shadow just smiles in response and squeezes his hand in reassurance.

“Oh, and um... Shadow?” Sonic pipes up.

Shadow gives Sonic a quizzical look.

“No more thinking you’re a monster or whatever,” Sonic states with a laugh, “Yeah, you tried to obliterate the earth in *one timeline*, but I have the potential to annihilate every timeline in existence.”

Shadow gives Sonic a thoughtful look before a smirk spreads across his face, “I don’t know? We’re immortal beings. I still have time to succeed where you left off.”

Silver cries out with anger and annoyance. He’s antsy and frankly sick of his dad’s flirting. It’s been a long, stressful day for a baby hedgehog and he needs a nap.

Sonic gives Silver a sheepish look before saying, “We should probably get home so we can put Silver to sleep.”

Shadow eventually agrees before holding his hand out to him, “You have the ability to use Chaos Control without an emerald.”

“I know,” Sonic retorts with a grumpy look, “I was just... Ya know, giving you a heads up before I did it.”

“Right,” Shadow nods back to him, not quite believing him.

Sonic takes his hand and warps them back home before Silver can have another fit.

# Just Married

## Chapter Notes

Thanks for sitting through Exposition: The Movie.

You deserve some fluff now. Also, one more chapter after this. The honeymoon.

Quick question. Do you want an Espio origin story? It's like 2/3rds done if you want it, I'll finish it and post it. If not, have an awesome day. lol.



## Chapter Twenty-Four: Just Married

Months pass and Spring is in full bloom on Angel Island. Knuckles has no idea what's caused it. He's seen the greenery before, but the flowers have sprouted almost out of control this year. It isn't a complaint and quite frankly makes the wedding that much more beautiful, but it's still an oddity.

Just before the ceremony is about to start, he places the Master Emerald onto the alter causing the island to rise in the sky once more.

Shadow is standing at the altar, shifting from one foot to the other. There are a lot of guests. Which isn't too surprising since this is Sonic after all. His friends and then some are here.

"Don't tell me you're getting cold feet," Rouge leans in and whispers to him with a slight grin.

“Me? Cold feet? Never,” Shadow states evenly. Although, he does have a slight pit of anxiousness in his chest.

“Uh huh,” she smirks as she places her hands on her hips, “I thought you were wearing the black tux. What happened?”

Shadow glances down at the stark white tux he’s wearing and sighs, “It’s Sonic. What can I say? He walked in on me getting dressed and decided last minute that he wanted to wear the black one instead.”

“Shouldn’t you be the one walking down the aisle then?” She teases.

Shadow grimaces, “He can have the pleasure of doing that. These people are probably all here to see him anyway.”

“Hm... Well, I guess it’s fitting. Considering you’re the one with the bridesmaids,” Rouge responds a bit snarky as she gestures to the girls beside her all wearing matching red dresses.

Shadow just rolls his eyes, “I simply know more women.”

Rouge glances over at the other side where Omega is fixing the little bowtie shaped magnet on his breastplate and donning a pitch black paintjob. He’s standing next to Tails who is holding a little dressed up Silver. Espio and surprisingly the commander are there too. Along with Topaz and Blaze who just felt uncomfortable wearing dresses. Rouge snickers, “I didn’t know you invited your boss. That’s a bit strange.”

Shadow whispers back a bit exasperated, “That was also Sonic’s decision.”

Rouge does some snooping in the crowd and spots the commander’s family. She shouts across the altar to him, “I’m glad your family could make it, commander! Your granddaughter is beautiful!”

The commander’s face twists into a frown and he turns away as if he hadn’t heard her.

“I can’t believe how beautiful everything is,” she comments as she looks around. “I might have to steal some ideas for *my* wedding,” Rouge says it loud enough for Knuckles to hear and the echidna ducks his head down a little.

“You can thank Miss Rose for that. She was the wedding planner,” Shadow states as she gestures to said pink hedgehog.

“You give me too much credit,” Amy responds from behind Rouge, “I would have never been able to pull it off without the funds the president gave us.”

Rouge flutters her wings a bit to get a better view of the people seated, “The president is here!?”

Shadow grabs Rouge’s shoulder and pushes her back onto solid ground before murmuring, “Don’t make a scene.”

Rouge is about to call him rude when the music begins to pick up. She’s kind of glad Shadow had stopped her from flying a bit too high.

Sonic isn’t really a blushing bride when he strides down the aisle with Cream tossing flowers about. He’s smiling and pointing finger guns at people all while being well aware of all the eyes on him. He poses a few times for cameras so they can ‘get his good side.’ He also stops in front of a news reporter and points at his brother who’s holding his son, “Make sure you get a close up on my kid,



Silver. He's cute as a button!"

Shadow can't believe he's marrying this guy. He's exasperated and embarrassed, yet he absolutely finds it endearing. Although, the fact that Sonic can freely admit Silver is his son to the public now makes Shadow feel proud of how far he's come with all of this.

Sonic still has his charms though and how he gets Shadow to blush with just a wink of his eye is still beyond him. He decides to give into it. For today at least.

As the blue hero makes his way up the altar, he exchanges a look with Shadow. He smiles and whispers, "I knew you'd look better in white."

Shadow looks away and shakes his head. So, that's why he wanted to switch last minute.

Sonic takes Shadow's hands and for once in his life waits patiently for Knuckles to begin speaking. He can't help the smile that keeps inching up his lips as he looks into Shadow's eyes and it's also proving to be difficult for Shadow to keep his usual scowl on his.

Once their vows are complete and they say their 'I dos,' they slip their wedding rings on their left hands to make it official. Sonic baits Shadow into a kiss before reeling him around, dipping him down like a overdramatic actor, and kissing him on the lips.

Shadow tries not to sigh. Instead, he just gives in and lets Sonic do his thing. At this point, there's no controlling him and he doesn't want to. A hand slides up Sonic's face and he deepens the kiss a bit more. When they separate, Shadow smirks, "You did that for the cameras, didn't you?"

Sonic gives him a guilty smile before replying, "Kinda, but the kiss you gave back left me a little star struck."

"I apologize," Shadow says, pretending it wasn't purposeful.

Sonic places Shadow back onto his feet and barrels toward his brother, "Let me see Silvy! He's a part of this too!" He takes the small hedgehog in his arms and makes his way back over to his new husband. His eyes ask the question Shadow knows he's going to ask. When he sees Shadow nod, his smile widens. He holds up Silver between them and the two newlyweds press a kiss to their son's cheeks. The flashes of cameras from the crowd is almost blinding.

Sonic snickers and points at one of the camera people before spouting, "Someone needs to send me that one!"

Shadow politely taps Sonic on the shoulder and states, "I have a surprise for you."

Sonic gives him a confused look.

As Knuckles carefully removes the Master Emerald from its resting place, the island slowly descends back down toward the ocean. As it does, Shadow takes Sonic by the hand and leads him out. They make their way off the island across the bridge until Sonic sees it.

Just on the other side of the bridge is a red racecar with winged ring emblems on it and Sonic's name on the front. It's also decked out with 'Just Married' lettering on the back.

"Did you just...!?" Sonic asks with awe. His legs wobble as he makes his way over to the hot rod.

Shadow grabs Silver and holds him against his chest just in case Sonic passes out or something. "Do you like it?" Shadow asks, even though he's sure he knows the answer.

“You bought me... *a racecar*, Shadow!” Sonic gushes as he hovers over the thing like he’s afraid to touch it because it could be a mirage.

Shadow nods once in affirmation, “Yes, to match your outfit. You can’t have a racing suit without a racecar.”

“I don’t deserve you, dude,” Sonic exclaims as he’s near to tears.

“Just get in the damn thing and try it out,” Shadow states with a bit of amusement.

“Shadow, don’t--!” But before Sonic can say anything he sees Silver moving his little mouth.

“Da... Da...” Silver tries to get out.

Sonic waits silently as his heart drops in his stomach. Crap, is Silver’s first word going to be a swear word? Sonic blinks before rushing over to the small hedgehog and waits with baited breath. Silver’s first word! Was he going to say his first word!?

Silver scrunches his eyes tight like he’s using all of his concentration before he finally says, “Dada.”

Both Sonic and Shadow are watching Silver in complete shock before meeting each other’s eyes.

“Did... did he...?” Sonic asks like he isn’t even sure of what he just heard.

“I think so,” Shadow murmurs as he locks eyes with the child.

“Say it again! Say it again!” Sonic shouts, jumping up and down.

Silver’s eyes watch Sonic bouncing about and gets a little dizzy. He blinks his eyes a bit before shouting out happily, “Dada!”

“Yes!” Sonic shouts out in a celebratory manner before taking Silver in his arms and swinging him around, “I’m dada! It’s me! I’m dada!”

Silver begins shouting ‘dada’ over and over again because Sonic continues to encourage him to do so.

Shadow smiles at the two and pulls out the keys for the car. He presses the button and it flashes before the doors unlock. He opens the door and motions toward it, “Hook Silver up in the car seat and we’ll get going.”

“You put a car seat in there?” Sonic asks with a laugh, “You think of everything.” Sonic holds Silver up by his armpits and asks, “Wanna go for a ride, kiddo?”

Silver holds his arms out and shouts happily, “Dada!”

Sonic blows a raspberry into his cheek before ducking into the back and hooking the child into the seat. He spots the little ear muffs and places them onto Silver’s head before making his way over to the driver’s seat. He slides his fingers over the controls and readies his feet on the pedals, “So... How fast can this thing go?”

“Mach 5,” Shadow states as he buckles himself in and folds his arms across his chest.

Sonic’s eyes are huge and sparkling, “Shut up! You’re joking, right?”

Shadow shakes his head, “No. This is the first project Miles and I worked on. He added that feature.

It's fueled by rings, similarly to how we keep our super forms fueled. The fastest thing alive needs to have the fastest vehicle in existence."

"Alright! Let's test this baby out!" Sonic says eagerly as he puts it into drive.

They shoot across the land like a dart before any of the guests can get there to wave them good-bye, but fast exits have never been new to those who know Sonic the Hedgehog. Although, arriving on time is another story. First one to leave and last one to arrive at the banquet hall.

Fashionably late.

Shadow isn't much of a dancer, but when Sonic pulls him onto the dance floor and tells him he has to at least dance to one slow song that night he surprises everyone by leading. He's actually a very elegant and poised ballroom dancer and Sonic is completely swept off his feet.

"You seem surprised," Shadow murmurs to him.

"I uh... Yeah. A little," Sonic responds sheepishly.

"You didn't get very far in my record collection, did you?" Shadow remarks with a smirk.

"I guess not," Sonic says, "but *now* I wanna look through it. You've got me curious."

Shadow chuckles lowly and continues to dance, purposefully ignoring the eyes on them. This was their wedding night after all and he doesn't want to do anything that would ruin it. He sees the wedding photographer at the corner of his eye and knows this is a moment that he'll be remembering years to come. He has to admit that there is something very serene about it though.

Later in the evening, they cut their cake. Shadow feeds a piece to Sonic and Sonic smashes the cake frosting and all into Shadow's face. Which just turns into a miniature food fight between them. It isn't malicious by any means and they're both laughing by the end of it.

When it's time to throw the bouquet, Amy is rearing to go. She literally pushes everyone out of the way in order to get the thing, but Rouge swoops in at the last minute and catches it. She lands next to Knuckles and gives him a suggestive look. To which Knuckles looks away with embarrassment. Amy deflates a little with a sigh, but when she sees a singular flower presented to her she gasps. One of the flowers must have fallen off of the bouquet when it was thrown and Blaze was holding the flower for her. Amy takes it shyly and blushes happily when she holds it to her heart.

Shadow sits back in amusement as a drunk Sonic grabs Tails and Knuckles onto the dance floor and starts dancing with them. His movements are more sloppy and careless than usual and Knuckles is more or less holding him upright so he doesn't fall over.

Shadow lets out a small snicker into his drink as he watches them, but his attention falls onto Rouge who sits down heavily next to him, her bouquet still in her arms like a trophy and Knuckles' tie hung loosely around her neck.

She contains her laughter as she motions her drink out onto the dance floor, "So, are you jealous that your sparkly new husband is hanging all over Knuckles?"

Shadow just raises an eyebrow at her, "Am I jealous that my husband is flirting with his best friend who is a respectable and devoted man to my sister? No, clearly not."

"Oooh," Rouge gives him an evil eye, "I'm telling him you said that."

“Go ahead,” Shadow rolls his eyes at her, “I’ll deny it. No one will believe you.”

Rouge sighs and sinks in her seat a little, “When you’re right, you’re right.”

Shadow motions toward the bouquet and smirks, “So, when am I expecting your wedding?”

Rouge shoves him a little and blushes, “Oh stop.” It’s silent for a moment before she’s admitting out loud, “I’m not sure. Hopefully soon.”

“I’m sure it will be,” Shadow tells her with a smile, “Otherwise, I’ll find that damn echidna and raise hell.”

“Oh my. A good old fashioned shotgun wedding,” Rouge says with a snort, “I’m truly a blushing bride.”

“Don’t tempt me,” he responds menacingly as he leans back in his seat. Although, the maleficent side of him wouldn’t mind setting the stage for that scenario to happen.

Espio makes his way over to the two and motions to the empty chair next to them, “I don’t mean to interrupt, but is this seat taken.”

“Not at all,” Shadow states, gesturing for him to sit.

“Thank you,” Espio says graciously. The guy is probably glad to be in company that he’s somewhat acquainted with. He seemed to be a little lost today given that Sonic’s friends are all very... flamboyant to put it lightly. He bows his head respectfully and says, “Congratulations and thank you for inviting me to share this joyous occasion. I give you my best wishes on your bright future.”

Rouge is stifling a laugh when she says, “Hey there, Hallmark card.”

Shadow sends her a sharp glare before introducing him, “This is Espio. He was my neighbor when I was living at my apartment.”

“Oh,” Rouge cringes a little, “I don’t envy you.”

Shadow elbows her a little and points to Knuckles who is trying to pry a drunk, kissy-faced Sonic off him, “It looks as though your boyfriend might acquire your assistance.”

Rouge pouts her lip out in disappointment because she knows when Shadow is trying to get rid of her, “Fine, fine.” She flutters away onto the dance floor and pulls Knuckles against her chest in one swift motion. When the blue hero begins dancing against him, they make an actual Knuckles sandwich on the dance floor.

Shadow shakes his head at her because she just made the situation worse instead of better, but he ignores it because it isn’t his problem. He turns back to Espio and says, “In all seriousness, the noise was probably frustrating. I apologize. I hope the neighbors who moved in our place were better.”

Espio looks away with a slight twitch to his eye, “I actually miss the two of you. The neighbor who moved in above me is much worse.”

Shadow gives him a look of astonishment, “Are you serious?”

Espio just gives him an exasperated shake of the head. He points to the disc jockey who is bopping along to the beat of the music and scratching the records. “Vector,” Espio states with a bite to his voice Shadow’s never heard from the calm chameleon, “His insistent music playing is unbearable.

I've reminded him several times to wear the headphones he so clearly wears at all times, yet he never listens."

The DJ glances up at the two and his eyes land on Espio for a moment before sending him a wink.

Espio looks away like he's disgusted and gets up from his seat, "Please, excuse me. If I'm in presence of that *cretin* for much longer it might trigger the urge to assassinate him and I am not willing to do so on your big day." He begins to walk away and Shadow can clearly hear Espio grumbling something in a different language and he's assuming its Japanese because he clearly picks up the word 'baka.' And that word in particular sounds like he's condemning someone to the fifth layer of hell.

Before Shadow can question the unusual actions, Sonic is running at him and draping his arms around his neck, "Shadooooow! Rouge is being meeeeeeaaan!"

Shadow sighs and plucks Sonic's ear with his thumb and index finger as he asks, "Were you flirting with her boyfriend?"

"Only a little," Sonic grumbles like a little kid, "Besides, I've known Knux longer than her. He's *my* friend." Sonic perks his head up as he sees Espio disappear behind a fancy looking glass door that leads to a balcony. His attention shifts to that, completely forgetting his dilemma with Knuckles, "Were you talking to Espio?"

"Yes," Shadow responds as he helps Sonic sit back upright, "He... mentioned something about assassinating someone?"

"Oh," Sonic shrugs it off like it's no big deal, "He's an assassin. Er... Well, he used to be. He was in a ninja clan."

"An *assassin* was living under us?!" Shadow asks with anger, "We had a *child* in that apartment!"

Sonic just gives Shadow a bland look like he doesn't understand what the big deal is, "I said he *used to be* an assassin. He wasn't an assassin when he was living under us. And besides, if you wanna get technical you were kinda an assassin at one point too.

"I... was... not," Shadow says slowly as he rethinks his past actions wondering if anything he's done could technically be considered assassination.

"Whatever, Shads," Sonic says with a smirk as he watches him fumble in order to defend himself. The hero adds where he had left off before Shadow interrupted him, "He escaped to the states and was living on the streets for awhile, playing his guitar to get by. Then, like... I noticed him and asked Rouge if she could give him a job playing at her night club."

"Rouge...?" Shadow has a distant look in his eye like he couldn't believe all of this was going down without his knowledge.

"Who am I to ruin someone's redemption arc, dude? He's a good guy. I promise," Sonic explains as he pats Shadow on the shoulder, "Besides, I feel like you guys really got along. I mean, you two didn't talk a lot, but I felt like you didn't need to. He just needed someone to relate to."

Shadow places his hand over his eyes and evens out his breathing. Sonic seemed to make sense and his judgment on people was pretty accurate. So, all he could really do is put his faith in him about this. He nods his head and turns to the hero, "Alright... I'm glad I could be of some assistance. Although, I'd prefer to not be left in the dark about it next time."

“Why? You’re part of Team Dark, right? Isn’t that how you roll?” Sonic states around some laughter as he collapses onto Shadow’s lap. Although he feels a little bit of guilt towards it when he says, “I legit forgot, Shadow. It didn’t have anything to do with what we were dealing with so it slipped my mind. I promise. I’m not hiding anything else from you.”

Shadow takes a moment to think about it before shaking his head, “No, in this case... I think I’m glad you had. I probably would have treated him differently had I known. Those who are justifiably trying to change and be better...are deserving of a second chance at life.”

Sonic’s face softens when he hears that and he goes to lean in to kiss Shadow, but he stops when he sees Knuckles making his way over to him. He rolls his eyes, “Here we go... What’d I do now?”

Once he stands in front of the two, he rubs the back of his neck nervously, “So, uh... I hate to leave so soon, but... I have a Master Emerald that’s unguarded and...”

“Wrong,” Sonic corrects with a smirk.

Knuckles gives him a confused look.

“I figured I’d take responsibility for it from now on. Ya know, so you could have your own life back. Build a house, start a family, all that stuff...” Sonic says with a snicker.

Shadow and Knuckles are glancing at Sonic, wondering if it’s just the alcohol talking.

“I don’t know how comfortable I feel about that,” Knuckles says a bit warily.

Shadow comments quickly after, “No offense, but neither do I.”

Sonic belts out a loud laugh at the two, “Did you guys actually just agree on something!?”

Knuckles places his hands on his hips and states, “I was appointed the guardian of the Master Emerald...”

“By me,” Sonic cuts him off.

“By *Chaos*,” Knuckles tries to corrects.

Sonic nods and cuts him off once more, “Which is me.”

Shadow tries to cut in to try and neutralize the conversation, “Wouldn’t it be best if the Master Emerald stayed afloat on Angel Island for security purposes?”

Sonic shakes his head, “Nope, I have a better idea.”

The two blink in confusion at Sonic.

“Only I can open the temple at Mystic Ruins, right? Well, I put the Chaos Emeralds, Master Emerald, and Time Stones in there,” Sonic explains with a sly look, “So, no one can get them except for me.”

Knuckles’ shoulders sag a little like he isn’t sure what to make of this information.

“That’s...” Shadow begins to say before giving Sonic an impressed look, “actually quite smart.”

“Yeah... I guess, but...” Knuckles looks unsure still even though he doesn’t seem to be questioning Sonic’s choices, “Now what?”

Sonic raises an eyebrow at him and motions toward the dance floor. Rouge is looking up at Knuckles, patiently waiting for him to return. Knuckles blushes at that and looks away nervously.

"I... uh..." Knuckles stammers.

"It isn't polite to keep a lady waiting," Shadow remarks with a dark smirk.

"Unless you're waiting for a show," Sonic adds as he pulls Shadow in tantalizingly close to where their lips are barely touching, "'cause from here on out, we're just gunna be smoochin' up a storm."

Knuckles looks away with a glare, "Yeah, no thanks. You do you." He turns away with a huff and stomps over to the dance floor.

Sonic snickers at his friend's reaction as he makes his way over to tell Rouge 'the news' and she's jumping into his arms excitedly, kissing his big, dumb face.

"How long?" Sonic asks Shadow.

Shadow looks back at him like he doesn't understand what he means.

"How long do you think it'll take Knux to pop the question?" Sonic finishes, relaxing back into Shadow's shoulder comfortably.

"That idiot?" Shadow asks with a bitter chuckle, "Either later tonight or never at all."

Sonic snickers at Shadow's comment, burying his face into Shadow's chest. Sonic sighs contently as Shadow wraps his arms around him in response. "Tails is gunna take Silver for the week," Sonic informs him with a relaxed smile.

"What for?" Shadow asks in confusion.

"I booked a flight for tomorrow," Sonic states, eyes glancing back at Shadow for his reaction.

"You planned a honeymoon," it isn't a question.

"Maybe," Sonic replies with a tight smile.

"Where?"

"A little place called Windmill Isle," Sonic states with a smug look.

Shadow just stares at him.

"Um... Have you never heard of Apotos?" Sonic asks him with a laugh.

"Sonic..." Shadow says with a sigh, "I've been two places in my life: Space and the United Federation."

Sonic just stares at him like Shadow had just been doing with him and nearly loses it when he says, "You had a Chaos Emerald for how many years and you never traveled the WORLD!?"

Shadow sighs like Sonic is over exaggerating.

"No," Sonic shouts as he gets on his feet, "I'm goin' over to your commander RIGHT NOW and tellin' him you're not going back to work until you've seen the world!!!" Sonic only makes it a few steps before he stumbling over himself and Shadow is catching him.

“We have our whole life to make those memories,” Shadow tells him with an exasperated look, “Besides the way you’re talking, it would appear you haven’t gotten the full experience. Let us take our time and see everything. Starting with this... uh...”

“Apotos,” Sonic fills in for him and gives Shadow a grateful look for helping him back onto his seat.

“Right,” Shadow nods to him, “but right now... it’s our wedding day. Let’s take it one day at a time.” He leans in to kiss Sonic tenderly and feels Sonic wrapping his arms around his neck in return. He smiles against his new husband’s lips and holds him securely, allowing Sonic to open his mouth and let their tongues glide together.

They savor the moment, getting lost in each other. Drowning in the depths of this night. Making memories they’ll remember for a lifetime and maybe a few they’ll forget in a fog.

Although enjoying each moment to their entirety.



# Honeymoon

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



## Chapter Twenty-Five: Honeymoon

Sonic watches the seagulls floating across the wind currents over the ocean as he breathes in the sea salt air. It feels different. Fresh and new. It's nice and the weather is perfect. Not too warm, yet not too cold. There's a nice breeze and the sun warms his skin.

Shadow arrives at Sonic's side, leaning his back against the white cement balcony that overlooks the white, sandy beach. He offers the sundae Sonic requested and smiles as the blue hero takes a few licks, his emerald eyes not leaving the scenery in front of him. Shadow glances at it from over his shoulder before turning to it full view.

"I have to admit, this place is beautiful," Shadow remarks, a calm to his voice.

Sonic finally looks over, knowing he'll be met with Shadow's smile. It still melts him to his core to this day. "Maybe we should move here after we retire," Sonic suggests with a mischievous look.

"We're immortal, Sonic," Shadow reminds him, stealing the pocky stick that's hanging off the frozen treat.

"Humans can't wage war forever," Sonic states with an optimistic charm as he attempts to grab the other end of the stick with his teeth.

Shadow jerks his head away at the last minute, but is forced to surrender it when he sees Sonic's pouting face. He allows Sonic to nibble on it until their lips meet and Shadow takes that as an invitation to kiss the hero's lips. When they part, Shadow leans his elbows against the barrier and sighs as he continues, "You underestimate the power of human beings. Yes, they're weak and frail, but together they can be an indestructible force. How many ancient ruins must we visit until you realize history repeats itself?"

"Everything has the power to destroy," Sonic points out with a bright smile, "but we're still here."

"I suppose anything is possible," Shadow caves, more so because he'd rather not think about it.

Sonic nudges Shadow, liking his optimism. Sonic snags one of the strawberries off the sundae and licks the whipped cream off it in delight. He holds his hand up against the sun and watches the light beaming off the ring on his finger. He can't believe they actually did it. They had finally gotten married.

Shadow's hand wraps around his and they lean closer, shoulder-to-shoulder. Shadow nuzzles his face against Sonic's neck and murmurs, "Are you quite done sightseeing for one day?"

Sonic tries to surpass a giggle from Shadow's face tickling his neck and he looks down at the bags of souvenirs next to him, "Yeah, you should get me out of here before I decide to buy you a Hawaiian shirt or something."

Shadow chuckles at the thought and helps with some of the bags as they make their way down the concrete steps, "I can't believe the president gave us a private beach to stay at."

"Really?" Sonic snickers, "He's such a big fan I'm surprised he didn't come with."

Shadow just rolls his eyes.

"He has a picture of us on his desk," Sonic informs as he slinks up next to him.

"Shut up..." Shadow states like he's bluffing.

"I wouldn't lie about that," Sonic says as he walks backwards in front of him.

"You're full of shit," Shadow pushes past him and heads for the shoreline.

"Whatever," Sonic allows Shadow his stubbornness and follows after him.

Shadow makes his way into the beach house and places the bags on the ground. He glances out the window at the sun going down and comments, "I don't suppose you have any plans? I'm not sure if you wanted to order something or go out."

Sonic stalks up behind him and rests his hands on Shadow's chest, "I think I'm hungry for something else tonight."

Shadow feels a smirk pull at his lips with intrigue, "I'm listening."

Sonic doesn't say anything though. He just takes Shadow's hand and guides him out of the beach house. They make their way down the steps and Shadow glances up at the ocean as they get closer to the shoreline.

"Are you willingly taking me into the water?" Shadow asks a bit mockingly.

"Maybe," Sonic says coyly, "Not exactly." He stops them right where the water pushes and pulls

away from the sand and Sonic leans in to kiss Shadow.

Shadow melts against it. This really wasn't what he was expecting, but it was nice anyway. Kissing his new husband on the brink of twilight was a little cliché, but he never minded simple.

"Shadow," Sonic whispers against his lips.

Shadow doesn't relinquish Sonic's lips to answer, wanting to feel this moment forever, "Mh..."

"I wanna make love with you," Sonic murmurs again, through the small gasp of breath.

That's when Shadow finally pulls away just enough to look into his eyes and question, "Right here?"

Sonic looks away sheepishly because Shadow's eyes are so intense, "I mean... If that's too weird then..."

"No," Shadow says almost instantly, his mind reveling in the idea. He rests his hand on Sonic's lower back and the other on his cheek before kissing him tenderly, "That sounds *exciting*."

Sonic is a little blown away by how onboard Shadow is with this. He doesn't question it though because he's being bent backward against the sand as the waves lick up and down his body momentarily.

Shadow is looking down at him, taking in this moment for what it is. He wants to memorize Sonic's half-lidded eyes, his sun kissed cheeks, and heaving chest. Shadow twines his fingers with Sonic's, feeling the ring against his finger and kisses his neck as he whispers, "You're look fucking gorgeous, love."

Sonic bites his lip and feels his emotions well up inside him like a overflowing swell. "Keep sayin' stuff like that and I won't last long," Sonic jokes breathlessly.

"All the same to me," Shadow murmurs and nuzzles into the crook of Sonic's neck, "I have an eternity to make love to my husband." Shadow hears the sharp breath Sonic sucks in against his ear and his hand travels down the hero's body, down between his legs.

"*Fuck!*" Sonic gasps out like he can't control himself.

Shadow grits his teeth at the sound of Sonic's desperate tone around the curse word. It still gets him every time. "Yes," Shadow seethes inches from Sonic's lips, like he's drinking in every moment of this.

Sonic glances down between them at Shadow's hand and how he's already leaking down his knuckles. Sonic's gaze meets Shadow's once more and his fiery eyes are ravenous with want. A grin crosses Sonic's lips before he says, "Better fuck me soon before I completely lose my mind."

Shadow snarls around a smirk as he leans against Sonic's legs, pushes them apart as he positions himself against Sonic's entrance, "You know exactly what to say to get what you want."

"What *I* want?" Sonic snickers and challenges, "Stop pretending like you don't want my *hot, tight...*" Sonic gets cut off when he feels the sudden intrusion and he's arching his back into it, welcoming it wholly, "Oh, yeah! Ungh!"

"It would be best if you hold that tongue of yours from now on," Shadow grits out with a dark tone, but it's also light like he's enjoying it. His fingers tighten with Sonic's as he moves his hips, basking in the sensation of Sonic's heat.

Sonic is grinning like a madman, completely gone with ecstasy before commenting, “Get a little closer and I’ll hold yours.”

Shadow bites his own lip at the thought and he lowers himself, “You dirty, little...” Shadow doesn’t finish, just lets a moan meld with his words as Sonic’s mouth meets his and their tongues fervently explore one another.

Shadow feels the waves sweep in around them and retreat back, each time leaving Sonic a bit more wet as the moon shines against the sheen of his quills. He isn’t sure if the blue hedgehog appears to be glowing or if it’s his own eyes seeing what they want, but he supposes it doesn’t matter. Either way, he wants Sonic. Wholly. Deeply. In any and every way possible.

Shadow is so fixated on getting lost in Sonic’s eyes, he hadn’t even noticed Sonic was doing the same as he whispers, “I can’t believe I’m your husband.”

Shadow feels his insides coil and his hips stutter a bit. He winces and orders, “Say that again.”

A broader smile appears on Sonic’s face, “I’m your husband.”

Shadow winces harder, the tightness only intensifying. Those were the exact words he wanted uttered back. “Yes,” Shadow whispers, his fingers gripping Sonic’s tighter.

Sonic’s legs wrap around Shadow’s waist tighter, wanting to feel him deep within him. Sonic cries out and throws his head back at the sensation, “I’m yours!”

“Oh my fucking...!” Shadow groans loudly, his will power crumbling into nothing. The swell comes in once more. Their bodies drenched and dripping and he can feel the hot precum dripping down his fingers with each pump of his hand on Sonic’s member.

“Cum inside me,” Sonic shudders out in a shaky tone, “Make me yours.”

Shadow has to blink the vision back into focus by how powerful the surge is through his body. He pushes in one final thrust before holding, filling Sonic’s fluttering walls with his hot arousal. His eyes don’t leave Sonic, watching his features contort to a silent scream before coming down with a content moan.

“Sh-shit, Shadow...” Sonic whispers, every nerve in his body electrified, “I’m so *full*.”

Shadow takes a moment to catch his breath before a tired smirk crosses his face. “Yeah...?” He questions before pressing a rough kiss to Sonic’s trembling lips, “Was that not what you were craving earlier?”

“Shut up, Shadow,” Sonic responds with a breathless laugh, “You know it was.”

Shadow kisses him once more, softer this time, and carefully pulls out. He watches Sonic wince a bit before laying down next to him in the sand. He observes how Sonic’s head is resting contently against the sand and how the waves roll in around his quills like it’s a natural phenomenon. Shadow takes Sonic’s hand into his once more and presses a kiss to his ring finger, “I meant what I said. About how gorgeous you are. A beautiful occurrence of nature. Like the desperate attraction of the waves to the brilliant moon.”

Sonic rubs the back of his neck and blushes, kind of embarrassed by Shadow’s words. “I wish I was more of a poet,” Sonic admits sheepishly, “but you’re hot like the sun.”

Shadow chuckles quietly at Sonic’s comment and finds it endearing as he kisses his temple.

Sonic nuzzles in closer, taking in a content breath of air before the tide comes in again and it's higher than before. It freaks Sonic out a bit and he gets up so he can scoot back a little, "Uh... I think you were right about that theory of the waves being attracted to the moon."

Shadow shakes his head and spares Sonic the lesson of the moon's gravity actually having an effect on the ocean's tides. He pulls himself up and holds his hand out for the hero, "Perhaps it's time to call it a night?"

"I dunno?" Sonic says a bit thoughtfully before pulling himself back onto his feet and wincing a little from the pain. He takes a breather before giving him a smirk, "I was thinking about some take out and a shower."

"I thought you were full," Shadow teases.

Sonic just rolls his eyes and guides him back into the beach house, "Just come on."

Shadow goes along with it, not bothering to press it further. He wouldn't want to ruin the moment.

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Sonic wakes to a light breeze washing over the soft cotton sheets. He rubs his eyes and stretches before murmuring sleepily, "Hey, Shad. Last night was..." He feels around the sheets and notices their cold. He slowly gets up and looks around to see that the gentle breeze is coming from the balcony.

The satin blinds flutter against the wind and Shadow is standing out, leaning against the railing as he gazes out at the shimmering ocean.

Sonic feels drawn to him as he gets out of bed. He pads over to the doors and stands next to him, "You okay?"

Shadow doesn't notice Sonic at first and he tries to dry his eyes as discreetly as he can, "Yes, sorry. I didn't mean to..."

"Night terrors again?" Sonic asks as he places his hand on Shadow's, telling him he's not leaving his side.

"Yes," Shadow answers, but rethinks it, "No... The opposite kind of."

Sonic waits patiently for him to explain.

"I was thinking about Maria's words to me... to us," Shadow murmurs, his eyes looking out searching. For what he doesn't know.

"You also live on this planet now, Shadow," Sonic responds with a confident smile.

"The bad I've done is permanent, but so is the good," Shadow sounds unsure when he says it.

"Live and learn," Sonic states, his smile gone but his eyes looking out with seriousness.

Shadow glances at Sonic and sees his mature nature. Something he doesn't see often, but he looks more than sure of himself. Shadow nods once before placing his hand atop Sonic's and looks out at the horizon with him.

What lies beyond it is unknown, but whatever it is he's sure they'll be able to tackle it together.

## Chapter End Notes

There's a third part to this called Solidarity. I'll put a link to it once it's up. If you want, you can follow the series I created called "Harmony, Unity, and Solidarity" and you should get the updates to it. I say should because I don't know this website very well. lol.

Also, there will be a hiatus before I post the next part just like last time, so it gives me time to edit it in advance.

Thank you so much for the comments, kudos, and views so far. It makes me happy that some enjoy this. Have a good day and I'll see you in the third part. <3

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!